

PARODY AND RELATED DEVICES IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S FICTION

by

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*I certify that this thesis is the product
of my own research and writing and that
all sources have been acknowledged.*

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Considered as a whole, the fiction of Samuel Beckett expresses disillusionment with those areas of existence which traditionally offer hope or comfort: the self, companionship with others, creativity, theology and philosophy. In Beckett's fiction the integrated self is unattainable, conflict and contradictions beset the psyche and thought and flesh inhibit one another. Motivation is ridiculous or mysteriously compulsive and emotions range from ennui to malice. In the texts which are narrated in the first person a literal existential awareness causes Beckett's characters to knowingly regard themselves as fictional - that is, as inauthentic people. Communication with others is too defective or vulnerable for consolation and in any case most of Beckett's characters are social exiles. Creativity is either artistic or organic and both are condemned. Literary creation is shown to be artificial and inadequate, as words and conventions obscure meaning. Organic creativity is a monstrous crime, since parents bear a horrific responsibility for the existence, and therefore suffering, of another being. God is probably vicious and theology is made to seem ridiculous or punitive. In Beckett's fiction philosophy is sophistical and meanings are fragile. This world is inhabited by beings with an insatiable need for order, harmony and certainty, all of which are shown to be self-delusive compromises on the part of those who are not prepared to confront existential emptiness.

This thesis argues that parody and its related forms are instruments for such disillusionment in Beckett's fiction. Parody is a tonally pliant device - it can be flippant or harsh. In Beckett's hands such tonal range is used to mock, ridicule or condemn attitudes, genres or specific texts. Moreover parody is extremely non-naturalistic, undercutting the convention, at work in some literature, that the text contains a ~~simulacrum~~^{mirror} of the world at large. In Beckett's fiction parody is, without exception, reductive. Travesty and burlesque are also used by Beckett for the purpose of mockery. Similarly, caricature not only diminishes its victims, when it is used against those characters which have appeared in earlier fictions by Beckett, it utterly destroys any claims which they seem to have for authentic self-hood - that is, a life beyond the frame of the text. Characters, then, seem manipulated and wooden.

The first chapter of this thesis offers a definition of parody through argument and illustration. Definitions for burlesque, travesty and caricature are also offered. The relationship which exists between parody and those qualities which are often associated with it : mockery, humour and satire, are discussed in this chapter. Finally, a definition is advanced for self-parody, the reflexive qualities of which are illustrated by an example drawn from Beckett's trilogy. This chapter forms the first section of the thesis : "Parody". It provides a definitive basis for the textual analysis which follows.

The second section, entitled "The Popular Parodist with his Sister and Six Daughters" considers the development of parody and related devices in Beckett's published fiction in English. The six chapters which constitute this section support the assertion that Beckett is a varied and accomplished parodist who uses this - and similar - devices to undermine the most basic human complacencies.

The final section of this thesis: "Sheath Within Sheath and the Missing Sword" consists of a single chapter which examines the comic and parodic basis for the estrangement between men and women and the hostility toward procreation which occurs in Beckett's fiction. It is argued that parody plays a significant part in the promulgation of these negative views, just as it has been argued, in the previous section of the thesis, that Beckett uses parody and related devices to discredit the assumption that literary creation is a valid activity.

Through the selective and systematic analysis of the effect to which parody and its related devices contribute in Beckett's fiction a more detailed insight is offered into this significant area of Beckett's narrative technique than has been attempted previously.

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TEXTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

(in alphabetical order)

- . *All Strange Away* - A
- . *The Beckett Trilogy* - Tr
- . *Company* - C
- . *Collected Poems in English and French* - CP
- . *For to End Yet Again and Other Fizzles* - F

This publication includes:

"For to End Yet Again"

"Still"

"He is Bareheaded"

"Horn Came Always"

"Afar a Bird"

"I Gave Up Before Birth"

"Closed Place"

"Old Earth"

- . *Film* - Fi
- . *First Love* - FL
- . *How It Is* - HII
- . *Lessness* - L
- . *The Lost Ones* - LO
- . *Mercier and Camier* - MC
- . *Malone Dies* - MD
- . *Molloy* - Mo
- . *More Pricks than Kicks* - MPK
- . *Murphy* - Mu
- . *No's Knife* - NK

This publication includes:

Stories - "The Expelled"

"The Calmative"

"The End"

"Texts for Nothing"

"From an Abandoned Work"

Residua - "Enough"

"Imagination Dead Imagine"

"Ping"

- . Proust - P
- . The Unnamable - U
- . Watt - W
- . Worstward Ho - Wo

Malone Dies, *Molloy* and *The Unnamable*, which together form *The Beckett Trilogy* (see above Tr), are, for convenience of reference, listed separately as well.

In the text the abbreviated reference and page number appears immediately after each quotation from the above works. For instance (W 245) refers to *Watt*, p. 245. When a work by Beckett occurs in a text of which he is not the author, for example the story "Ill Seen Ill Said", which appears in *The New Yorker*, this information is supplied in a footnote. A full bibliographical listing of the above texts is, of course, to be found in the List of Works Consulted.

A special case is Beckett's first, unpublished large prose work, "Dream of Fair to Middling Women". I have had access to the manuscript of "Dream of Fair to Middling Women". However, since this thesis is limited to discussion of Beckett's published fiction, my source for quotations from this text is Lawrence E. Harvey's¹ *Samuel Beckett : Poet and Critic*, in which fragments of "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" are quoted, with the tacit approval of the author.

1. Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett : Poet and Critic*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press (1970).

INTRODUCTION

*Not many minutes later the six-four
entered the station. It did not take
up a single passenger, in the absence
of Mrs Pim. But it discharged a bicycle,
for a Miss Walker.*

Samuel Beckett (W 245)

In *The Unnamable*, the narrator writes of "the echo that mocks" (U 324) - a phrase which describes parody and its general function in Beckett's fiction. Cleverly timed repetition and mockery are comic devices in themselves, and much of Beckett's parody is extremely funny. However, there is another dimension to his use of parody. Parody is non-naturalistic and it emphasises the contrived nature of narrative. Beckett writes knowingly artificial fiction. Parody and those devices which are related to it - such as burlesque, travesty and caricature - are both a cause and an effect of this literary knowingness. Many critics of Beckett's work have discussed parody in passing. But this thesis offers a definition of parody and its linkages with similar devices; a close reading of Beckett's fiction in English which reveals the changing significance of these techniques; and an interpretation of the ultimate commentary on creativity implied by Beckett's use of parody.

The first section of the thesis defines many of the terms which will be applied to Beckett's work in the chapters which follow. Parody and its connections with mockery, satire, burlesque, travesty, caricature and humour are explored in this first section and in some instances exemplified. Finally a definition of self-parody is advanced, and the similarities and differences between self-parody and non-parodic authorial repetition are discussed. Since this study as a whole is intended to interpret the use of parody and related forms¹ in Samuel Beckett's fiction, and to apply the use of this narrative technique to Beckett's broad artistic concerns, definitions are necessarily somewhat limited. Areas such as the etymology of terms and the history of that literature which employs parodic techniques are only referred to where they are considered to be directly relevant to the general discussion.

The six chapters of Section II analyse the development of Beckett's use of parody and related devices. As Beckett's style progresses from the lively and wordy convolutions of texts such as *More Pricks than Kicks* through to the sparseness of works like *Company*, the functions and effects of his parodies change. The most noticeable feature of Beckett's early use of parodic technique

1. "Parody and related forms" is derived from Margaret Rose's second chapter "Distinguishing Parody From Related Forms" in her book, *Parody//Metafiction*, London, Croom Helm (1979), p.39.

is humour. The early parodies are part of the general comic vivacity of the works which host them, works in which parodies and the parodic group : burlesque, travesty and caricature, blend with many comic devices and scenarios. Certain of these parodies, however, have internal critical significance. These are Beckett's parodies of literary genres and conventions, which disparage their subjects through comically overstated imitation. In doing so, they identify genres which are antipathetic to the work in which they are embedded, and mock conventions which do not have a serious place in their own text. Such parodies define, by default, the nature and perimeters of the work in which they appear. Lawrence E. Harvey noted Beckett's remarks on the way in which literary conventions obscure pure expression:

Being ... has been excluded from writing in the past. The attempt to expand the sphere of literature to include it, which means eliminating the artificial forms and techniques that hide and violate it, is the adventure of modern art.²

When Beckett's fiction parodies "artificial forms and techniques" it purges these forms and techniques from within the text in which the parodies appear. In Beckett's work literary parody has a comic effect and a qualifying function.

Beckett's development of a first-person narrative voice has significant implications for his use of parody. Increasingly, fictional creation becomes the obsession of his narrators and the subject of his narratives. Within this context of sustained literary self-consciousness, self-parody (in which narrators parodically comment on their own fictions, or on those of previous Beckett narrators) develops a vital position. Through self-parody, previous fiction is critically assessed and qualified, but as this takes place in the fiction within which the self-parody occurs, this fiction itself requires qualification and re-definition. So the self-parodic text progresses in loops, doubling back on itself and leaping forward. This results in a text which is "always on the alert against itself" (NK 141) like the self-described mind of

2. Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett, Poet and Critic*, p. 249.

the narrator of "From an Abandoned Work". Self-parody leads to a regressive, almost circular re-working of the text and its use reflects a compulsion towards narrative precision and authenticity which Beckett's narrators share. If self-parody has the capacity to re-define a previous text in the interests of greater accuracy, it also has a tendency to cancel that previous text: to make it obsolete and ridiculous in the same way that literary parody may make those literary conventions at which it is aimed unusable, by poking fun at their excesses. Beckett's narrators use self-parody, if not to shatter the distorting mirrors of their narrators, at least to illuminate the distortions. In this way, self-parody negates the pretensions to authenticity and accurate reflection in the text in which it occurs, or in previous texts by the same narrator. It is therefore an instrument of denial, and as such it is part of a structure of reductive denial of the veracity of fiction, a structure which brings Beckett's narrators close to a state of narrative cancellation and creative silence. Such a state promises relief from inauthentic narration and pseudo-identity. However, this relief is unattainable through self-parody, which carries the seeds of its own perpetuation.

More recently, Beckett has turned from these self-perpetuating yet unprogressive texts, to produce fictions like "Ill Seen Ill Said", which are brief, but far from trivial. Such works are not conventionally parodic.

Section II aims to analyse a representative selection of Beckett's parodies, from the exuberance of early comic parodies, burlesques (and so forth) and the significant playfulness of literary parodies, through the self-scrutiny of the first-personal texts and beyond. In order to concentrate more fully on Beckett's published fiction in English, all other works by Beckett have been excluded from detailed discussion. A comprehensive analysis of parody in Beckett's other works - his non-fictional prose, his plays and the French texts (from which he originally translated, approved the translation of, or collaborated in the translation) - as well as an analysis of parody in his fictional works in English, would require a more lengthy study than is possible in a work of this length.

The final section of the thesis discusses the way in which Beckett applies parody and similar devices to that comic perennial: the war between the sexes. Among the most amusing and harsh parodies, travesties and caricatures in Beckett's fiction are those which concern women, love and sex. Through these it is suggested that "true love" is banal, that physical coupling is grotesque, and that attempted communication between the sexes is futile. Those social and literary conventions which traditionally emphasise the transcendent qualities of love are parodied. Furthermore, a polarisation is established between the ways in which men and women extend their identities through individual creation. With some exceptions, women give birth, while men create imaginatively. Neither one is judged positively.

The essential argument of this thesis is that in Beckett's fiction parody and those devices which are related to it are used as agents of disintegration. Parodic mockery breaks down the credibility of its target and in Beckett's fiction categories of ideas, literature and people are reduced in this way. Parody is so extensive in this fiction - its targets are as ephemeral as advertising jargon or as significant as the literary conventions which are used non-parodically in the same text as they are parodied - that the very cognitive function of perceiving things, people and art in categories comes to seem like complacency. In Beckett's fiction "the echo that mocks" is the echo that dissolves illusions and disintegrates fundamental assumptions. Parody and its related devices are the essence of Beckett's literary presentation of the fragmented and disillusioned world of man.

SECTION 1

PARODY AND RELATED FORMS: TOWARDS A DEFINITION

... the appearance of a figure rediscovers its mysterious virtue when it is accompanied by its reflection. In effect, a figure appearing does not evoke its own mystery except at the appearance of its appearance.

René Magritte

Of all things art has an impact on, art is the most susceptible and responsive.

Leo Steinberg

CHAPTER 1

PARODY

Our experience of reality is immensely diverse. Few objects with which we come into contact can be said to be precise duplicates of familiar objects - and if they do appear to be the same, they tend to occur in different and unfamiliar contexts. Similarly, no event in our lives can be a point-for-point repetition of a previous event - although the occasional flash of *déjà-vu* will give us the impression that this has occurred. So we tend to see things and circumstances in terms of categories based on their similarities, evaluating objects and acting in situations according to our memories of similar objects and situations: an essential mechanism for coping with the variety which our existence presents to us. Wallace Stevens eloquently describes the sense of similarity in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction", remarking that "Life's nonsense pierces us with strange relation". The poem deals to a certain extent with the difficulties involved in balancing our impulse to bind words, ideas and things together against a certain fidelity to the original separateness of these ideas and objects. Stevens writes of "the celestial ennui of apartments". This is a typically enigmatic image which, taken in the context of the poem, may be interpreted as a metaphor for our apparently divinely authoritative (and tedious) capacity to compartmentalise our experience of the unique into categories.¹

This chapter concerns an artistic and critical "apartment" (to borrow Stevens' word) - a category in which various individual artistic phenomena are grouped, by general agreement. The discussion which follows attempts to suggest where the walls of the apartment lie - to isolate the features which the artistic phenomena in this category share. It must, however, be borne in mind that the walls of the "parody" apartment have open doors into rooms marked "satire" and "burlesque". George Kitchin's remark that "parody ... is a very elastic term"² serves as a warning against the dogmatic definition

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1. Wallace Stevens, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction", *Selected Poems*, London, Faber and Faber (1976), pp. 100, 102.
 2. George Kitchin, *A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English*, New York, Russell and Russell (1931), p. xxii.

of terms which, though theoretically distinguishable from one another, tend in the process of interpretation to be somewhat interchangeable. We might add to this Rudolf Arnheim's observation that

... the scientist builds conceptual models which, if he is fortunate, will reflect the essentials of what he wants to understand about a given phenomenon. But he knows that there is no such thing as the full representation of a given instance.³

Our "conceptual model" of parody must begin with the very obvious acknowledgement that parody is a category which aids the interpretative organisation of specific artistic works. It must also take into account that interpretative falsification may occur if a general definition of parody is rigidly imposed upon particular creative works which may conform in general to this category but deviate from it in certain details. Flexibility and circumspection are necessary when formulating a general definition and applying that definition to specific creative works.

Parody

The general critical consensus is that parody is mimetic and referential. This is its most easily recognisable quality. The word "imitation" is frequently used loosely by those who have concerned themselves with the definition of parody, to mean the way in which parody may either broadly refer to a subject or closely mimic a subject. The point is that parody is symbiotic, rather than self-sufficient; it works through the recognition of similarities, echoes, and patterns of association.

Evident imitation sets parody aside from other forms of art, especially those which attempt to create the illusion of reflecting external reality. The distinction may be clarified by briefly comparing a work which has stimulated numerous parodies, Richardson's

3. Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, Berkeley, University of California Press (1974), p. 2.

Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded, with one of those parodies, Fielding's *An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews*.⁴

In *Pamela*, Richardson illustrates a process of temptation, resolute virtue and reward. He does this by creating the illusion of an authentic exchange of letters, a series of journal entries and editorial interjections. Illusion and authenticity are of primary significance in a work like *Pamela*: the imaginative imitation of the writing style of all characters and the action which they report must be so plausible that we are not pre-eminently conscious of *Pamela* as an imaginative fabrication.⁵ *Pamela* is underpinned by the assumptions that erudite, virtuous and extremely strong-willed waiting-maids exist (or have existed historically); that the virtue which Pamela upholds will be accepted as such by the reader; and that the lesser characters and their actions will likewise ring true. *Pamela* is typical of the kind of text which seeks, self-effacingly, to mirror external reality, as distinct from parody texts, which are dependent on a different kind of veracity.

Fielding's *Shamela* trumpets its connection with *Pamela* as forthrightly as his central character, Shamela, describes the way in which she grasps every opportunity for self-gratification or social advancement. The book purports to correct "the many notorious FALSEHOODS and MISREPRESENTATIONS of a Book called P A M E L A"⁶ by

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4. cf. the treatment of *Pamela* and *Shamela* in J.L. Davis, "Criticism and Parody", *Thought* (Fordham University, New York) No. 26 (1951) pp. 188-190. My choice of parody text is not, however, entirely governed by Davis' inspiring example. I am comparing *Pamela* with *Shamela*, rather than the better-known *Joseph Andrews*, because *Shamela* confines itself to a quite overt kind of parody and so it is more useful for the purposes of brief illustration than the more complex *Joseph Andrews*.
 5. Richardson based the events of *Pamela* on the recollection of a story about incidents which had actually occurred, however this does not diminish the fictional quality of *Pamela*, which is both a complex and detailed projection of Pamela's imagined traits - vivacity, tenacity and literacy - as well as the study of her imagined reaction to sexual threat. The woman to whom the original incidents occurred did not write letters or keep a journal.
 6. Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin (1961), p. 299.

offering the "authentick" correspondence between the characters in *Pamela*. This is clearly not meant seriously. Unlike the "Virtue Rewarded" subtitle of *Pamela*, which is intended to be taken at face value, Fielding's lengthy title page is consciously implausible, an obvious hoax. Through distorted imitation, *Shamela* immediately challenges those assumptions which a sympathetic reader of *Pamela* must hold. The didactic quality of *Pamela* is imitated in cynical or banal aphorisms. The unlikelihood of a young girl writing letters in Pamela's accomplished prose is implicitly suggested by Shamela's letters, which are mis-spelled, colloquial and very short. Pamela's virginity is her jewel, to be defended at any cost; Shamela's virtue - or "vartue", as she calls it - is histrionically feigned. The characterisation in *Pamela* is followed closely, but inverted, so that the powerful becomes the dupe, the infatuated bumbler becomes the *roué*, the dignified and honourable becomes the coarse and deceitful. Similarly, *Pamela*'s plot appears in a recognisable but distorted form. The effect of all this is to point up unconscious ambiguities in Richardson's work, to establish interpretations which clearly run counter to his intentions. Pamela benefits so ostentatiously and materially from her virtuous behaviour that this behaviour becomes vulnerable to alternative readings: Richardson's pure maid is Fielding's dissimulating schemer. The point is that without *Pamela*, *Shamela* is incomplete: a ribald curiosity without integrity or purpose. Read with a knowledge of *Pamela*, however, it is an amusingly inverted imitation of the most fundamental tenets of *Pamela*, an imitation which questions the veracity of those tenets. Not all parodies imitate their subjects as closely, or in as straightforward a manner as *Shamela*. However, parodies are characteristically dependent on their subjects for full meaning. Parodic imitation of those subjects, then, is usually very obvious.

In works like *Pamela*, borrowings, influences and echoes are internalised in the narrative, immersed in a flow of art which pretends to directly recount life. Yet this identification between

the work of art and the external world is illusory. The painter Magritte plays on the gap between an image and the object, with which the image is, conventionally, identified, in his work "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*". This inscription appears below a painted pipe. Magritte draws our attention to his pipe as paint and canvas, to the distance between the represented and the actual object. He makes the same point discursively in a letter to André Bosmans:

To name the image of a tree "Tree" is an error, a "mistaken identity", since the image of a tree is assuredly not a tree. The image is separate from what it shows.⁷

In parodic imitation, there is no illusory oneness with the subject. Parody proclaims itself secondary, derivative.

The kind of literature which candidly exposes its own contrivance (parodically or otherwise), repudiating any pretensions to the offering of a coherent illusion of external reality, has had a long and rich tradition, from Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* onward. It is currently enjoying a resurgence of popularity, allegedly due to a contemporary artistic questioning of the representational quality of language, and the tendency of formally structured, illusionist art to falsify the contradictory flux of experience.⁸ Doris Lessing touches on this problem in the preface

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7. René Magritte, in a letter to André Bosmans. Quoted by Harry Torczyer in *Magritte: Ideas and Images*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. (1977), p. 109. For an interesting discussion on Magritte's position in resemblance and naming, see Margaret A. Rose, *Parody // Metafiction*, pp. 102, 140.
 8. For an interesting discussion of this, see Ihab Hassan, "The Dismemberment of Orpheus", in Robert Scholes (ed.), *Learners and Discerners: A Newer Criticism*, Charlottesville, The University Press of Virginia (1964), pp. 137-65. Similar points are made by Philip Stevick, in his paper "Scherezade Runs out of Plots, Goes on Talking, the King, Puzzled, Listens: an Essay on New Fiction"; and Gerald Graff, "The Myth of the Post-Modernist Breakthrough", in Malcolm Bradbury (ed.), *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, Manchester, Manchester University Press (1977), pp. 187-247.

to her novel *The Golden Notebook*, where she articulates the uneasiness felt by the writer who compares lived experience with the fiction derived from this experience:

How little I have managed to say of the truth, how little I have caught of all that complexity; how can this small neat thing be true when that I experienced was so rough and apparently formless and unshaped.⁹

As John Barth points out, the artist may resolve this dilemma by celebrating the contrivance of the artwork:

A ... way to come to terms with the discrepancy between art and the Real Thing is to *affirm* the artificial element in art (you can't get rid of it anyhow) and make the artifice part of your point instead of working for higher and higher fi with a lot of literary woofers and tweeters.¹⁰

These are the distinctions and dilemmas of practising artists, aware of the cleavage between the kind of reality which we find in art and our direct experience of existence. Barth's recommendation indicates his approval of literary self-consciousness; that is fiction which, in the words of Robert Alter, "flaunts its own condition of artifice and ... by doing so probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality".¹¹ The extent of such probing is a matter of degree. However, the comparison between *Pamela* and *Shamela* shows that parody belongs to art which is knowingly contrived, as opposed to art which creates the illusion of reality.

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9. Doris Lessing, "Preface to the Golden Notebook", in Malcolm Bradbury (ed.), *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, p. 176.
 10. John Barth interviewed by John Enck, "John Barth: An Interview", *Contemporary Literature*, V. 6 (1965), p. 6.
 11. Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: the Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*, Berkeley, University of California Press (1975), p. x.

The parody in *Shamela* is a playful and stylised imitation of an original subject - *Pamela* - which, through ironic reshaping, re-orientates the perceiver toward that subject. In the following pages this definition will be tested against other parodies. The discrete components of parody, its potential effects, and the way in which it combines with and is distinct from related forms will also be discussed.

The nexus of parody consists of intertwining linkages, or relationships. There is the relationship between parody and subject, which, as we have seen in the comparison between *Pamela* and *Shamela*, may be very close. Then there is the relationship between parody and perceiver (in which the original subject substantially intrudes). In the following paragraphs the general nature of these relationships is suggested.

The subject of parody may be as specific as an individual creative work or as general as a widely espoused attitude. Roger Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* describes the wide range of subject matter available to the parodist:

(The) 'original' may be another work, or the collective style of a group of writers, but although parody is often talked of as a very clever and inbred literary joke, any distinctive and artful use of language - by, for example, journalists, politicians, or priests - is susceptible of parodic impersonation.¹²

J.L. Davis makes a similar point, more amusingly: "Parody may exists in all the arts and sub-arts, from architecture and the dance to acting and salesmanship."¹³

12. Roger Fowler (ed.), *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1973), p. 137.

13. J.L. Davis, "Criticism and Parody", *Thought*, p. 181.

By selectively referring to his original subject the parodist indirectly comments on the excesses or singularities of the subject. He may therefore project a point of view on the original subject which he has himself assumed. However, although parody may have a polemical relationship to its subject, the relationship is, for general purposes, best described as one of interplay and illumination.

The parodist must be sensitive, to some extent, to the knowledge and attitudes of his public since without some familiarity with the subject which is imitated the reader or viewer will not grasp the parodic intention. This is not to suggest that a close acquaintance with the subject (on the part of either parodist or perceiver) is absolutely necessary. In *Murphy*, Beckett points up, through parody, a radical divergence between the mundane and the arcane. We need not be familiar with esoteric cults to appreciate as parody the description of Neary's mystical capabilities:

This man, at that time, could stop his heart more or less whenever he liked and keep it stopped, within reasonable limits, for as long as he liked. This rare faculty, acquired after years of application somewhere north of the Nerbudda, he exercised frugally, reserving it for situations irksome beyond endurance, such as when he wanted a drink and could not get one, or fell among Gaels and could not escape, or felt the pangs of hopeless sexual inclination. (*Mu* 6)

Neary's skill is undermined at the outset by qualifications: "at that time ... within reasonable limits". The deliberate vagueness of "somewhere north of the Nerbudda" - Nerbudda being a term for the sacred Indian river Narmada - lends a dubious note to Neary's accomplishment. Moreover, his skill is hopelessly inappropriate to his practical requirements: alcohol and sex. A double incongruity is at work in the last few lines, with the casual but discordant inclusion of the threat of Gaels among the more banal situations which Neary finds insupportable. Now this is a very broad parody, referring us not to an individual text or set of texts. Instead,

it is an exaggeration of the popular and sensationalist view of Eastern mysticism, specifically, as Richard N. Coe has pointed out, "the meditation techniques of Yoga, Zen and Za-Zen".¹⁴ The point is that while Beckett does not, in this instance, draw on a detailed knowledge of these techniques himself, or expect a corresponding knowledge from his readers, to predict and control the effect of this parody Beckett must be aware of some potential scepticism towards this type of mysticism in the minds of his readers.

The parodist must reshape the original subject in a manner which indicates a function other than that of direct imitation. Otherwise the perceiver may assume that the artist owes an inspirational debt to the original: that the similarities between the two indicate an influence or a partial quotation. Alternatively, he may conclude that a coincidence has occurred. The difference between parodic and non-parodic allusion may be clarified by the following examples. When Thackeray called his novel *Vanity Fair*, he intended his reader to recall the Vanity Fair sequence in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. This reference works in one direction: no insight is offered into *Pilgrim's Progress* itself. Parodic imitation, however, points ironically back to the original subject. For example, the "Three Dialogues" in which Beckett puts forward his view that "expression is an impossible act" and that "to be an artist is to fail",¹⁵ imitates the title and form of Bishop Berkeley's "Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous: in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists". Berkeley uses fictional classical characters to make his arguments: Philonous, who acts as his mouthpiece, and Hylas, who raises objections. This is imitated in the dialogues between Beckett and Georges Duthuit, where the former suggests apparently impossible propositions to the latter, who assumes the voice of commonsense. Both sets of

14. Richard N. Coe, *Beckett*, Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd (1964), p. 25.

15. Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit, "Three Dialogues", in Martin Esslin (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall Inc. (1965), pp. 20-21.

dialogues have a dramatic quality which takes them beyond point and counterpoint. However "Beckett" and "Duthuit" are not fictional names, so by following the convention used by Berkeley in all aspects except the adoption of stylised apostrophes, they impute fictional attributes to their identities - at least insofar as those identities are represented on paper. At the same time the possibility of the kind of enlightenment offered through Berkeley's dialogues is denied - in their different ways, both Beckett and Duthuit are consciously floundering, and their dialogues end inconclusively.

The techniques which the parodist uses to contrive a reference which is more than specifically mimetic and to achieve an imitation which emphasises aspects of the original subject about which the parodist wishes to inform the perceiver have been succinctly defined by Margaret A. Rose in her book *Parody // Metafiction* as:

juxtaposition, omission, additional condensation
... and discontinuance of the original context
which it (the parody) alludes to.¹⁶

Essentially, then, the parodist reshapes original material, defending against literal interpretation and alerting the perceiver to the purpose of his imitation by overstating or understating and dislocating features of that original material.

These generalisations may be clarified by analysing a substantial example of literary parody, taken from Beckett's novel *Watt*.

The book begins with Mr Hackett, a bitter cripple, making his way to a seat by a tram-stop in an unidentified city. He discovers a pair of lovers on the seat. After closely inspecting their

16. Margaret A. Rose, *Parody // Metafiction*, p. 45.

entwining bodies he hurries a policeman to the scene, apparently hoping to bring a charge of public obscenity. However by the time Hackett and the policeman arrive the seat is empty. Hackett settles himself there. He is joined by a couple, whose names we later discover to be Goff and Tetty Nixon. After the opening platitudes, the conversation turns to a mutual acquaintance, one Grehan, a solicitor and a poisoner. Grehan has received a lengthy prison sentence which is, however, not stiff enough to satisfy Hackett or Goff Nixon. Hackett reads aloud a florid love-poem which Grehan has sent him. The poem is an easily recognisable parody. After this recital, Tetty and Goff discuss the birth of their son, Larry, during a dinner party. Goff was apparently ignorant of his wife's pregnancy. However, he proudly describes the way in which Tetty, after delivering Larry, chewed through the umbilicus.

The context of this parody is worth paraphrasing in such detail because it works so strongly against the attitudes expressed through the poem itself. On the one hand we have Hackett's voyeurism at the tram-stop, the lack of compassion for an imprisoned acquaintance, the absence of basic communication between husband and wife, and the spirited expulsion and isolation of the child Larry, the product of their union. On the other hand we have Grehan's trippingly sentimental and coyly sensual ode:

TO NELLY

*To thee, sweet Nell, when shadows fall
 Jug-jug! Jug-jug!
 I here in thrall
 My wanton thoughts do turn.
 Walks she out yet with Byrne?
 Moves Hyde his hand amid her skirts
 As erst? I ask, and Echo answers: Certes.
 Tis well! Tis well! Far, far be it
 Pu-we! Pu-we!
 From me, my tit,
 Such innocent joys to chide.
 Burn, burn with Byrne, from Hyde
 Hide naught - hide naught save what
 Is Greh'ns. IT hide from Hyde, with Byrne burn not.*

*It! Peerless gage of maidenhood!
 Cuckoo! Cuckoo!
 Would that I could
 Be certain in my mind
 Upon discharge to find
 Neath Cupid's flow'r, hey nonny O!
 Diana's blushing bud in statu quo.*

*Then darkly kindle durst my soul
 Twahit! Twahoo!
 As on it stole
 The murmur to become
 Epithalamium,
 And Hymen o'er my senses shed
 The dewy forejoys of the marriage bed.
 Enough -*

Ample, said the lady.
 A woman in a shawl passed before them. Her belly could
 dimly be seen, sticking out, like a balloon (W 9-10).

The reception of Grehan's poem as a straight love lyric is complicated by the contrast between the sentiments expressed in the poem and those embedded in its context. Longing for reunion with a loved one does not seem consistent with the world of Hackett or the Nixons. So we are alerted to an ironic authorial intention. This is reinforced by the poem itself: the intrusive bird-calls, gratuitous archaisms, laboured puns (Burn, Byrne, Hyde, Hide), exaggerated exclamations and the absurdity of Echo giving an original reply to a question all suggest contrived clumsiness on Beckett's part.

These banalities also establish the parodic reference of the poem, since they constitute a debased pastiche of certain Shakespearean lyrical techniques, and by extension, of the Petrarchan tradition. Through this parody Shakespearean ideals of love and concord are indirectly imported into *Watt* in order to contrast these ideals (and any literary expression which they might receive) with the state of love and marriage in *Watt* itself. In *As You Like It*

Shakespeare plays with the expression of carnal delight in a song punctuated by "hey nonino" and imitated birdcalls. The expression and attitudes in this song are quickly qualified by Touchstone's mockery: "I count it but time lost to hear such a foolish song, God b' wi' you, and God mend your voices" (V.iii,38-40).¹⁷

Touchstone's comment reflects his own pragmatic views on love, amusingly contrasting these with the sentiments of the song. Grehan's poem imitates the convention into which this song falls, rather than this specific instance. However it is worth noting that Shakespeare's use of this convention is not entirely straightforward. On these grounds Grehan's poem is a parody of a convention which Shakespeare has already counterpointed, rather than a ridicule of the convention as it is used by Shakespeare. At the same time, references to Shakespeare's plays suggest that certain ideals which are put forward through these plays are to be borne in mind by the reader of the opening pages of *Watt*.

On one level, Grehan's poem is intended to ironically contrast the romantic ideals of works such as *As You Like It* with the *Watt* world. However the poem also implicitly introduces the darker side of Shakespearean amours: those which do not seem certain to continue happily beyond the frame of the play. Grehan's poem resembles the concluding lyrics of *Love's Labour's Lost* in which spring and winter are described in song. Each stanza concludes with a bird-call: spring is the season of the cuckoo, which "mocks married men" with a cry signifying infidelity; winter is the time of the owl. Grehan's poem, too, has a chorus of bird-calls, the last of which are the cuckoo and the owl. In Grehan's cuckoo stanza, he uneasily hopes for Nelly's fidelity during their estrangement. Since this is before the stanza celebrating his anticipated marriage, Grehan, speculatively at least, becomes a cuckold before he becomes a husband. If we accept the connection between the concluding lyric of *Love's Labour's Lost* and Grehan's poem, the last stanza of that poem becomes

17. All Shakespeare references are to the Signet Classic editions.

ominously ambiguous, for in it the owl presides over Grehan's intended wedding, and in Shakespeare's song the owl is the bird of winter, the time "when blood is nipp'd and ways be foul ... And birds sit brooding in the snow" (V.ii,924, 931).

The sinister connotation which Grehan's status as poisoner carries is reinforced by the comparison of this poem with Balthazar's song in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Similar in tone and technique to Grehan's poem, Balthazar's song also deals with the suspected infidelity of the beloved. The song urges ladies to overlook masculine waywardness: "Converting all your sounds of woe/Into hey nonny nonny" (II.iii,69-70). In response, Benedick remarks:

... I pray God his bad voice bode no mischief.
I had as live have heard the night raven, come
what plague could have come after it. (II.iii,82-85)

Benedick's intuition foreshadows the false accusation of Hero, later in the play. Similarities are also noticeable between the first stanza of Grehan's poem and the words of Edgar/Tom in *King Lear*. The image of Hyde moving his hand amid Nelly's skirts recalls Edgar/Tom's injunction, in the full flight of assumed lunacy and demonic possession, to "keep ... thy hand out of plackets" (III.iv,98). So the apparent lightheartedness of the first stanza of Grehan's poem is undermined by the resemblance of the poem to Balthazar's song, and by the oblique reference to Mad Tom of *King Lear*.

The final couplet of stanza three directs us to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The "Cupid flow'r" of Grehan's couplet is the plant responsible for delightful confusion in that play. Oberon recounts how the flower acquired magical properties when accidentally struck by a shot from Cupid's bow. He also gives its common name: "Love-in-idleness" (II.i,68). Nowadays we know it as the pansy. In Elizabethan times the term had connotations of unrequited love.¹⁸

18. Doris Hunt, *The Flowers of Shakespeare*, Exeter, Webb and Bower (1980), p. 26.

Grehan's reference seems particularly wistful - by his own admission, Nelly and her suitors are far from idle. Diana's bud suggests chastity, or at least restraint - Oberon invokes it when he releases Titania from her infatuation with Bottom: "Dian's bud o'er Cupid's flower/Hath such force and blessèd power" (IV.i,76-77). Grehan would likewise wish to cancel, or limit, Nelly's amours, but the only sorcery available to him lies in the words of his poem, which in any case has fallen into the unsympathetic hands of Hackett. The reference to Diana's bud also recalls Claudio's accusation of Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*:

You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
As chaste as the bud ere it be blown;
But you are more intemperate in your blood
Than Venus, or those pamp' red animals
That rage in savage sensuality. (IV.i,56-60)

Since Hero's chastity is substantiated, this reference suggests an element of wish-fulfilment on Grehan's part. The amusingly banal latinate phrase which concludes the stanza is appropriate to Grehan's ex-profession of solicitor. The term is, of course, punning, since Grehan may be either a legal advocate or a solicitor(-er) of women.

In the final stanza which Hackett reads, Grehan anticipates his reconciliation with Nelly, in a harmonious nuptial blessed by Hymen. Hymen presides over the massed nuptials which conclude *As You Like It*, resolving the confusions of identity and crossed purposes with which that play abounds. After Tetty Nixon interrupts Hackett's reading of the poem, a woman in an ungainly stage of pregnancy crosses in front of the trio, as if to point up the inevitable result of the wedlock which Grehan celebrates. The woman is a debased version of Titania's Indian priestess, the mother of the boy coveted by both Oberon and Titania. Titania likens her

pregnant friend's gait and appearance to a billowing ship's sail, "big-bellied with the wanton wind" (II.i,129). In *Watt* the image of floating in free wind is vulgarised, the pregnant woman's "belly could dimly be seen, sticking out like a balloon" (W 10). The wind image is here confined to an image of breath trapped in a balloon. The Shakespearean references throughout the poem situate Grehan in a pre-resolution phase, like that of Hero before her honesty is established, or the lovers of *As You Like It* without Rosalind's manipulation or the intercession of Hymen. However the sense of the possibility of a harmonious conclusion which informs *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It* is absent from *Watt*. Threat and isolation mark Grehan's current state, and reconciliation and concord seem unlikely in the context of *Watt*.

Written under sordid circumstances, presented to the public by an embittered grotesque, missing its intended recipient and meeting instead with the derision of auditors whose circumstances do not equip them to respond to it on any level, Grehan's poem and its reception form a sardonic vignette of the creation of a work of art and its reception. A certain distance from the representation of day-to-day reality (the reality extrinsic to art) makes parody an appropriate vehicle for generalised comments about art.

The analysis of this parody illustrates principles of the device which were mentioned earlier. This parody does not imitate a specific work. Rather, it refers us to a cluster of works by the same writer, and to a tradition upon which that writer drew. Beckett ensures that his imitation of the blithe songs on the subject of love which appear in these works will not be interpreted as a tribute, by overstating in compressed form the silliest of their features. Through general references to Shakespeare, Beckett points up the inappropriateness of happiness, harmony or even communication to the characters of *Watt*.

Parody and Derision

Many of the critics who have discussed parody have considered it possible to define the characteristic attitude of the parodist to his raw material, or to define the tone of parody itself.

The distinguishing quality of parody has frequently been regarded as derision. Arthur Koestler, obviously adhering to this view, writes of "the detached malice of the parodist".¹⁹ Similarly, Robert P. Falk asserts that "the parodist is out for a laugh at somebody's expense".²⁰ The suggestion of a connection between parody and derision is discernible in Henri Bergson's remark that:

It is doubtless the comic in parody that has suggested to some philosophers, and in particular to Alexander Bain, the idea of defining the comic, in general, as a species of degradation.²¹

and, in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Wayne C. Booth describes the subject which is imitated in parody as an "object of ridicule".²² These comments give the misleading impression that parody is always one step removed from invective. Parody may be hostile, but is not, in fact, invariably so. There is a great difference between the teasing mockery which is available to the parodist, and malicious ridicule. Dorothy Van Ghent rightly attributes a broad and complex emotional range to parody:

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19. Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, London, Hutchinson (1976), p. 52.
 20. Robert P. Falk (ed.), *The Antic Muse: American Writers in Parody*, New York, Grove Press (1955), p. 8.
 21. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Translated by Cloudesley Brereton, London, Macmillan and Co. (1911), p. 124.
 22. Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press (1974), p. 123.

Instead of confronting two opposing views with each other, in order that a decision between them be arrived at, parody is able to intertwine many feelings and attitudes together in such a way that they do not merely grapple with one another antagonistically but act creatively on each other, establishing new syntheses of feeling and stimulating more comprehensive and subtle perceptions. Parody - except that of the crudest kind - does not ask for preferential judgements and condemnations. It is a technique of *presentation*; it offers a field for the joyful exercise of perception and not a platform for derision.²³

As the analysis of the parodic function of Grehan's poem, earlier in this chapter, suggests, the distorted reference of parody may simultaneously serve many complex and subtle critical purposes. Strong derision is a possibility, rather than a necessity, with parody.

Parody and Satire

The relationship between parody and satire is complex and subtle and satiric parody also elicits a wide range of possible responses. T.S. Eliot remarked that "the satirist is in theory a stern moralist castigating the vices of his time and place".²⁴ There is an engagement with injustice or folly in satire and this often involves or suggests an impetus towards the healing of whatever example of injustice or folly is taken to task: that is, an impetus towards an ideal. Perhaps the degree of this corrective intention determines the extent of the satiric range. We are all familiar with strongly corrective satiric parody such as Swift's *Modest Proposal* which, through a parody of the style of political pamphleteers, suggests a solution to the Irish problem which is so shocking that it might be hoped to stimulate forces for positive change. However in much modern literature the values to which Swift's satire appealed have either disintegrated or been displaced.

23. Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston (1961), p. 13.

24. T.S. Eliot, quoted by Arthur Pollard in *Satire*, London, Methuen and Co. Ltd. (1970), p. 50.

This is not to say that satire has disappeared. The ideals in Beckett's mature fiction are the anti-ideals of passivity and retreat, of solipsism, decay and annihilation. Remedies - positive change on a broad social level and progress in general - are remote, in that they necessitate a commitment to life which is alien in such fiction. Moreover, events tend to be subordinate to the *description* of events, so that the true subject of the texts may be the tension between verisimilitude and artifice, between actuality and imagination. Parody is used to disintegrate the conventions of literature, the certainties of existence or the suggestion that there is an improved state of being within reach. This parody, however, can be seen to *satirize* people's efforts to find comfort, certainty and hope in life or literature. Under these conditions satiric parody has a corrective intention which is an inversion of the Swiftian normative corrective. For Fielding, the satirist exercised a curative influence, he was a "physician",²⁵ but Beckett's parodic satire offers the harshest of remedies and recommends the most radical surgery, such as the excision of all belief. Satiric parody then is as individualistic a field as derisive parody. Neither lends itself to absolute judgements or generalisations.

Parody, Burlesque, Travesty and Caricature

Parody, burlesque and travesty interlock in a way which deserves attention, both because it reflects on the tone of parody in general and because of the similarities between the terms. M. Willson Disher sees the three as closely identified, emphasising their derogatory capabilities: "Perverse imitation may become the ... parody, travesty or burlesque of persons".²⁶ Some confusion exists as to the distinction between these devices, all of which share a similar use of ironic, non-naturalistic imitation. Burlesque is generally held to be the comic inflation of a general and commonplace subject, while in travesty an apparently elevated subject is trivialised. Insofar as the devices may be separated - and Fowler's *Dictionary*

25. Henry Fielding, quoted by Louis A. Landa, Introduction to Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings*, London, Oxford University Press (1976), p. viii.

26. M. Willson Disher, *Clowns and Pantomimes*, New York, Benjamin Blom (1968), p. 29.

of *Modern Critical Terms* suggests that "distinctions (between parody, travesty and burlesque) can seldom in practice be sustained, since ... the categories obscure the complex intermingling of parodic effects"²⁷ - burlesque and travesty are considered to be more specifically mocking in intention than parody. As the dictionary stresses, the rigid application of these terms often becomes unnecessarily limiting and parody, burlesque and travesty are likely to be seen as overlapping and shading into one another. Caricature is also related to these devices. Fielding captures its exaggerated, derisive quality:

... in the *caricatura* we allow all licence. Its aim is to exhibit monsters, not men; and all distortions and exaggerations whatever are within its proper province.

He goes on to draw a distinction between burlesque and caricature, on the basis of the artistic forms which they most commonly take: "what *caricatura* is in painting, burlesque is in writing".²⁸ Although caricature has connotations of the graphic arts and burlesque has a theatrical quality, such specific identification is both restrictive and currently inaccurate. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the provinces of caricature as "picture, writing or mime". Burlesque, travesty and caricature differ from parody in that they are inevitably iconoclastic or mocking, whereas parody does not necessarily ridicule: the parodist may be whimsically ironical. However the similarities are strong enough for these devices to be considered part of a closely linked group. All contain ironic references to an original subject which is familiar to the perceiver, and a form of representation which is not naturalistic is common to all.

27. Roger Fowler (ed.), *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, p. 138.

28. Henry Fielding, in the Author's Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, p. 9.

Parody and Humour

A comic tone which is less specific than comic ridicule is generally, by definition, attributed to parody. The parodic distortion of the original subject involves contrast, exaggeration or understatement, and displacement of elements of the original, all of which are comic techniques, varieties of incongruity. Most theories of comedy hold that the combination of such contradictory or disparate elements is likely to amuse us. Moreover, although parody is not by definition mocking, much of it is irreverent and such anti-complacency may be funny. A brief consideration of points which have been raised in various notable commentaries on humour establishes those features of it which are common to parody.

Comedy is at least in one sense primarily disorderly and irrational: farce and slapstick²⁹ routines focus on the apparent hostility of inanimate objects and "the body's vulnerability"; scatological and sexual humour suggests the unreasonable demands of our physicality; the many forms of comic wordplay rely for effect upon an unexpected congruity within apparent incongruity (thereby pointing up contradictions within the linguistic system and within our processes of thought); various kinds of exaggeration and grotesquerie, likewise, rely for effect upon incongruity; while comic obscenity defies our system of social taboos. A great many attempted definitions of comedy situate it fundamentally in disorder and unresolved contradictions. For Maurice Charney, "comedy depends upon the breaking of rational order and causality".³⁰ According to Max Eastman, "the funny is the surd, the absurd, the very thing you cannot fit into a pattern".³¹ Kierkegaard considered that "wherever there is life, there is contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction, the comical is present".³² Wylie Sypher

29. Walter Kerr defines slapstick as "the body's vulnerability" in *Tragedy and Comedy*, London, The Bodley Head (1967), p. 151.

30. Maurice Charney, *Comedy High and Low*, New York, Oxford University Press (1978), p. 5.

31. Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Laughter*, New York, Halcyon House (1959), p. 287.

32. S. Kierkegaard, quoted by Karl S. Guthke, in *Modern Tragicomedy*, New York, Random House (1966), p. 55.

suggests that "comedy, not tragedy, admits the disorderly into the realm of art".³³ Freud classifies wit as "displacement and absurdity", arguing that it originates in the preconscious (irrational) psyche.³⁴ In stressing the contradictions of our human situation and the limitations of the flesh, comedy is essentially anarchic and reductive. It is reductive because most comic devices implicitly contrast man the impulsive animal with the assumed ideal of man as a creature made in God's image: reasonable, just, controlled and controlling. Arthur Koestler varies this point slightly when he asserts that comedy implies a contrast between "hubris of mind, earthly materiality of body".³⁵ Essentially illogical and disillusionary, comedy also undermines predictability on a very basic level, since the comic effect itself depends largely on the unforeseen. Max Eastman conveniently summarises other theorists on this subject:

The suddenness is of the essence of the process, and this has been agreed on by widely differing thinkers - by Hobbes with his "sudden glory", Kant with his "sudden coming to nothing", and Dr Johnson with "something sudden and unexpected".³⁶

So both in terms of the form of comedy (which must, in order to be effective, involve surprise or shock) and its implicit view of man as emphatically flawed and terrestrial, the comic universe is unpredictable, illogical and anarchic.

However the argument that parodies are by definition funny because incongruity is built into the type of imitation which

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- 33. Wylie Sypher, "The Meaning of Comedy", in Robert W. Corrigan (ed.), *Comedy: Meaning and Form*, San Francisco, Chandler Publishing Co. (1975), p. 23.
 - 34. Sigmund Freud, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*, London, Kegan Paul (1922), pp. 60, 234.
 - 35. Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p. 45.
 - 36. Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Laughter*, p. 44.

parody uses is limited, because it suggests that incongruity *as such* is invariably funny. Furthermore, not all parody is comically derisive. Moreover cultural and situational variables influence our capacity for humour to a considerable extent and our response to comedy is immensely varied. Beckett asks, through the narrator of "The Expelled": "... does one ever know oneself why one laughs?" (NK 17). Characteristically, this question has as much to do with self-awareness as it has to do with humour ("does one ever know oneself?"). With these cautions in mind, it is still useful to include humour as a fairly consistent component of parody.

Literary Parody

Having broadly outlined the nature of parody, it is now necessary to consider the qualities of two specific areas of interest: literary parody and self-parody. It will become apparent in later chapters that these considerations are especially pertinent to Beckett's use of parody. At the same time, the following discussion should reveal certain parodic techniques which have not yet been touched on in this chapter.

The Russian Formalist school of literary criticism imputed enormous significance to literary parody, and to literary self-consciousness, suggesting that by re-shaping attitudes to literature and individual texts, parody becomes an agent for re-orientating literature itself. Victor Erlich, in his book *Russian Formalism: History - Doctrine*, summarises the rationale behind this point of view:

... parody is often a lever of literary change; by poking fun at a specific set of conventions which tend to degenerate into stale clichés the artist paves the way for a new, more 'perceptible' set of conventions.³⁷

37. Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History - Doctrine*, Gravenhage, Morton and Co. (1955), p. 165.

At the basis of this is an awareness of the capacity of parody to freshen the reader's perception of the original text by alerting the reader to the parodist's perspective on that text. Perhaps due to close identification with its subject, the kind of literary parody which functions pre-eminently as literary analysis may expose gratuitous artistic idiosyncracies in a way which has more immediacy and impact than direct literary analysis.

The Formalist Viktor Shklovsky valued parody and literature which draws attention to its contrived nature (as opposed to literature which attempts to create the illusion of directly reflecting reality) for, among other things, its capacity to sharpen the perception of the reader, considering this to be an essential function of art: "the purpose of art is to make us see things, not to know them. Art is there to awaken us from our usual torpor".³⁸

Eugene Ionesco has also recognised and exploited various effects which facilitate the renewal of audience perception, the shock which identifies things and situations almost as if they have no antecedents. Among these effects he lists parody:

It was not for me to conceal the devices of the theatre, but rather to make them still more evident, deliberately obvious, go all out for caricature and the grotesque ... No drawing-room comedies, but farce, the extreme exaggeration of parody.

We need to be virtually bludgeoned into detachment from our daily lives, our habits and mental laziness, which conceal from us the strangeness of the world ...³⁹

In other words, rather than providing us with an escape from reality

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38. Viktor Shklovsky, quoted by René Welleck, in "Russian Formalism" in George Gibian and H.W. Tjalsma (eds), *Russian Modernism: Culture and the Avant-Garde, 1900-1930*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press (1976), p. 42.
39. Eugene Ionesco, *Notes and Counter-Notes*, translated by Donald Watson, London, John Calder (1964), pp. 24-5. Elsewhere in the same work, however, Ionesco remarks that the retrospective, referential aspect of parody is basically alien to the kind of effect he has created. I do not mean to imply that Ionesco is a "formalist", just that he acknowledges the shock effect of caricature and parody.

or comfortably echoing our views of the world, art may be confrontationist, stressing its vital otherness, its fictive and synthetic status. (In Ionesco's case, this appears to serve the purpose of opening one's eyes to the strangeness of life.)

Literary parody especially is also fundamentally ambivalent, in that the parodist's emulation of the subject suggests an engagement with that subject, while the implicit message of the parody may be derisive. This ambivalence is ironical, in the sense in which Kenneth Burke has defined the word: "irony ... merges the sympathetic and antipathetic aspects of any subject".⁴⁰ As well as the contradiction inherent in this imitative engagement with the subject and critical - or dialectical - detachment, there is a further contradiction in the parodic effect. Parody may make readers or viewers perceive a subject afresh, yet it is essentially a retrospective device: one which looks back to a previous subject.

So literary parody is a supremely contrived device - rather than attempting, as much literature does, to re-create external reality, it may act as a commentary on such attempts. The subject of the next discussion, self-parody (which mimetically analyses the work - or body of work - in which it appears) is even more tightly reflexive, becoming "like the breeze's tale of what a breeze is, like the rose's tale of what a rose is".⁴¹

40. Kenneth Burke, "Thomas Mann and André Gide", in Morton Dauwen Zabel (ed.), *Literary Opinion in America*, New York, Harper and Brothers (1951), p. 249.

41. Kurt Vonnegut Jr., *Mother Night*, London, Jonathan Cape (1968), p. 98. Vonnegut's narrator, Howard W. Campbell, uses this beautiful image as a simile for his wife's lovemaking. However the ideal of authenticity which the image suggests is ironically undermined later in the novel, when the narrator doesn't realise that his wife's sister has been substituted for his wife. It is typical of Vonnegut's style of authorial self-consciousness that the simile occurs in an inter-fictional context - a book written by Campbell called "Memoirs of a Monogamous Casanova", of which a passage is included in *Mother Night*, and that the woman's sexual technique itself should be likened to a narrative, a 'tale'.

Self-Parody

The subject of self-parody is (as the term suggests) the work of the parodist himself. The identification of such parody holds its own problems. Most fiction by the same author has a certain homogeneity, returning to similar themes, ideas or situations. Distinguishing between this kind of authorial repetition and self-parody can involve judgements on the basis of subtleties in tone and style. In Beckett's case, at least, self-parody involves exaggerated and mocking repetition in the service of qualification, refinement or purgation of the stances taken in earlier narratives. The indicators are the same as those which divide allusion from parodic allusion: references have significant bearing on the original, as well as the secondary work.

In the kind of parody which has been discussed so far, the construct of a mind which is alien to that of the parodist is imitated, or the conventions established by a succession of alien minds are referred to. In parodically echoing his own earlier work, however, or referring to the genre in which he has worked or is working, the self-parodist engages in a regressive inquiry, internally orientated towards his own creative self. When subject and parody are the product of a single consciousness, it is natural that the creative processes of this consciousness should provide the focus of the parody, and the actual role of artistic creator should, subtly or overtly, be thrown into relief. As well as highlighting his own artistic motivations, the self-parodist is likely to question the techniques he uses to fix his creative insights into accessible form, to draw attention to both the purpose and structure of his craft. When the processes of literary creation, the relationship between the artist and his creation, and the form of the work itself become primary concerns of fiction, the literary self-parodist amplifies the contrived nature of his narrative, reinforcing its status as an imaginative construct rather than a reflection of reality.

Beckett, as we shall see later, uses self-parody for a wide range of effects. An example, in which he specifically parodies the content of his own fiction, shows how a certain type of self-parody redefines the work of its creator and highlights the role of artificer. This example is from the trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*.

The first section of Beckett's trilogy is a reminiscence by Molloy, isolated in his dead mother's room, waiting for his own death and writing "in the tranquillity of decomposition" (*Mo* 25). Molloy's manuscript is read by a nameless individual, perhaps acting on behalf of an equally mysterious group. He provides Molloy with money, encouragement and artistic direction (which Molloy, however, finds incomprehensible). He seems to be a caricature of a publisher's editor.

The tale concerns an earlier time when Molloy, crippled but made mobile by a bicycle and crutches (both of which he describes with delight) engages in a self-defeating search for his mother:

... all my life, I think I had been going to see my mother ... And when I was with her, and I often succeeded, I left her without having done anything. And when I was no longer with her I was again on my way to her, hoping to do better the next time. And when I appeared to give up and to busy myself with something else, or with nothing at all anymore, in reality I was hatching my plans and seeking the way to her house ... (*Mo* 80)

Molloy is repeatedly disappointed by the actual woman, the incoherent ancient creature whose head, "veiled with hair, wrinkles, filth, slobber" (*Mo* 19) he knocks in an attempt to provoke responses to his needs. This knocking, as if Molloy is asking permission to enter her skull, is symptomatic of his yearning for synthesis with his mother: the source of his confusing (for him) and fragmented psyche. So are Molloy's intimations of incest: "perhaps she took

me for my father" (*Mo* 18). Molloy hints that his mother embodies the possibility of resolution and unity in his life:

And if ever I'm reduced to looking for a meaning to my life ... it's in that old mess I'll stick my nose to begin with, the mess of that poor old uniparous whore and myself, the last of my foul brood, neither man nor beast. (*Mo* 19)

For Molloy, as for most of Beckett's characters, the search for existential meaning or significance is central. However Molloy's regressive and escapist search for his mother breaks down in her physical presence and ultimately even this presence is denied him. The reminiscence begins with Molloy writing from his mother's bed, possessed of all her objects and hopelessly attempting to assimilate her absent identity: "I have her room. I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot. I have taken her place. I must resemble her more and more" (*Mo* 9). Molloy has become a caricature of his mother, and his staccato sentences, with their quality of desperate incantation, ironically betray his failure to wring "meaning" from her existence. Moreover, Molloy's substitution of himself for his mother suggests his own ambiguous longing to be needed, to have a son for whom he is crucially important. Although Molloy insinuates that this is the case - "It seems to me sometimes that I even knew my son, that I helped him. Then I tell myself its impossible" (*Mo* 9) - no ageing child materialises, Molloy is terribly isolated.

Molloy explicitly describes the motivation behind his compulsive search for the elusive goal that is his mother. Toward the end of the tale he relates his journey through a forest, crawling in elliptical circles with the aid of his crutches. Despite the physical hardship which this entails, he finds it impossible to remain still and reject the compulsion to find his mother. The source of this compulsion is described as a series of unreliable external "imperatives" of fluctuating intensity:

my imperatives ... nearly all bore on the same question, that of my relations with my mother ... Yes, these imperatives were quite explicit and even detailed until, having set me in motion at last, they began to falter, then went silent, leaving me there like a fool who neither knows where he is going nor why he is going there. And they nearly all bore, as I may have said already, on the same painful and thorny question. And I do not think I could mention even one having a different purport. And the one enjoining me then to leave the forest without delay was in no way different from those I was used to, as to its meaning. For in its framing I thought I noticed something new. For after the usual blarney there followed this solemn warning, Perhaps it is already too late. (*Mo* 79-80)

This final "warning" is appropriately ominous: however unsatisfactory Molloy's mother may be, however removed from the significance with which he invests her, he will never see her again. Now the imperative may be Molloy's externalisation of an impulse which he does not fully understand, or an attempt to deflect responsibility for his quest and its failure away from himself. If, however, we see them as part of a straightforward description of his situation we have the picture of Molloy motivated by uncontrollable urges which have been foisted upon him by mysterious and sinisterly knowledgeable external forces.

Molloy's mother, as well as being the mystic goal of his quest, the fetish object which remains obstinately and fallibly human, is acknowledged as the central subject of his tale. Molloy interrupts his celebration of bicycles to remind us that

Unfortunately it is not of them I have to speak, but of her who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct. First taste of the shit. (*Mo* 17)

This revulsion from the progenerative function of women, combined with an obscure compulsion towards them, is characteristic of Beckett's narrators. Incapacitated and therefore unable to undertake

a physical quest, Molloy shifts his search from a physical to an artistic level. However, the narrative, taken as a further attempt by Molloy to reconcile himself with his mother, falters in palpable self-delusion: although Molloy claims to have taken her place, he has clearly not assumed her identity or achieved insight into the "meaning" of the "long confused emotion" (*Mo* 25) which has been his own life. Similarly, he equates his paralysis with a "tranquillity" which is some distance removed from the obsessive search he feels constrained to describe. As the goal of Molloy's quest, his mother offers no fulfilment and Molloy's evasive digressions testify that as the central subject of his tale she is equally elusive. Molloy's ultimate situation is an impasse: refusing to admit to the failure of his quest, he is unable, physically or artistically, to progress or retreat in any direction.

Molloy's quest is reflected in the distorting mirror of the narrator's tale in *The Unnamable*. The connection between these two self-conscious narrators suggests more than an incidental similarity, more than the closeness one would expect from different minds with related creative tasks. Beckett firmly links the two.

The Unnamable⁴² is a solitary voice in an indeterminate space. His descriptions and fantasies form a network of artistically functional ambiguities and contradictions. This makes direct comparison between Molloy and the Unnamable difficult. However when the Unnamable calls himself the "walled-in one (about whom) everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows" (*U* 355) and describes his surroundings as grey, shot through with yellow and pink (*U* 332) and a "mixture of solid and liquid" (*U* 360) he appears to be a monstrously quickened

42. To call the narrator of *The Unnamable* "The Unnamable" is to name him, which is, in a sense, counter to Beckett's intention. However, for the purposes of this discussion, the impossibility of finding an alternative to a title dictates that he be so named.

foetus, dreaming in the amniotic fluid. (Elsewhere in the narrative his descriptions suggest that he is in quite different locations under different conditions.) This unresolved foetal imagery parallels the way in which Molloy cocoons himself in his mother's room, hoping to blend with her identity. Neither narrator seems to gain from the quasi-foetal state.

Like Molloy, the Unnamable tells us that his narrative is solicited and shaped by an enigmatic group. However in *The Unnamable* the relationship between the storyteller and his external guides - who may be no more than personified motivations - is extremely complex and negative.

For the purpose of defining the relationship between Molloy and the Unnamable, it is significant that the Unnamable fantasises about the process of imagining a destructive quest for his mother:

... I would have liked to lose me, lose me in the way I could long ago, when I still had some imagination, close my eyes and be in a wood, or on the seashore, or in a town where I don't know anyone, it's night, everyone has gone home, I walk the streets, I lash into them one after the other, it's the town of my youth, I'm looking for my mother to kill her, I should have thought of that a bit earlier, before being born ... (U 360)

It is impossible for the narrator of self-conscious fiction to immerse himself completely in his imaginative work, for self-conscious narration by its very nature requires objective (though possibly implicit) commentary on the part of the narrator, as well as a certain engagement with the tale itself. In this passage the *Molloy* search - in which the memory of a forest and seashore, as well as the search for the mother, figure prominently - is repeated and given a more highly charged imaginative form. In the Unnamable's retrospective view the quest becomes a vengeful pursuit, situated in a time when the imagination was, to some extent at least, an effective vehicle

for escape. The neat synopsis suggests that the Unnamable is Molloy at a later stage of artistic development. Elsewhere he claims to have created Molloy, along with other previous characters in Beckett's fiction:

All these Murphys, Molloyes and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone. (U 278)

Stopping speaking has a high priority with the Unnamable. So he is an ultimate repository for the identities of previous characters, including Molloy. But his relationship to them is complicated by what he sees as their deceit and deficiency as scapegoats. In any case, by constructing a compressed and derisive version of Molloy's tale he becomes Molloy's parodist. Since he has identified himself with Molloy, the passage in which he describes Molloy's quest is self-parodic in a way which is more emphatic than if Molloy and *The Unnamable* narrator were wholly separate characters or if *The Unnamable* had been recounted entirely in the third person by an omniscient unself-conscious narrator who had nevertheless echoed *Molloy*. The Unnamable is an internal and fictive self-parodist.

A sustained parody of *Molloy* appears early in *The Unnamable*. This detailed restatement of *Molloy* takes the form of a fable in which the central character is the Unnamable's self-created "caricature" (U 289) Mahood. Mahood is a cripple who progresses on crutches "in a kind of inverted spiral" (U 290). Mahood has perhaps disintegrated physically in the exotic and corrupt Javanese jungles, thick with rafflesia: the corpseflower. This tale concerns his homecoming. His family inhabit a rotunda surrounded by a vast area of dirt and ashes, into which Mahood spirals on his crutches. Mahood's family, who are eagerly watching him, cannot assist him directly. He cannot hobble straight into their rotunda, but must

approach them by a gradual and circular route. The family is described with the kind of humour which sometimes springs from helpless bitterness. The elderly members, consumed with hatred for one another, reminisce about banal incidents in Mahood's past. Thin and clearly ineffectual hymns to a "meek and mild" Jesus are sung. Children born and presumably conceived by Mahood's wife in his absence are encouraged to echo the platitudes of their elders. Before Mahood reaches them they all die ignominiously of sausage poisoning. At this point the Unnamable disassociates himself from Mahood and provides alternative endings to the tale. In Mahood's version (still related by the Unnamable) Mahood retreats from the death scene in the rotunda. Over-ruled by the Unnamable, Mahood is made to wallow appallingly in the dead flesh of his family:

... stamping under foot the unrecognisable remains of my family, here a face, there a stomach, as the case might be, and sinking into them with the ends of my crutches, both coming and going. To say I did so with satisfaction would be stretching the truth. For my feeling was rather one of annoyance at having to flounder in such muck just at the moment when my closing contortions called for a firm and level surface. I like to fancy, even if it is not true, that it was in my mother's entrails I spent this last day of my long voyage, and set out on the next. (U 297)

In this fable the definitive images of *Molloy* are restated or presented in exaggerated but recognisable form. This emphasises their continuing importance to the narrator and offers an internal interpretation of these images.

Molloy and Mahood, great travellers and physical doubles, progress compulsively yet haltingly. Both characters approach their goals obliquely. Since Mahood derives no pleasure from his crippled state, the interpretation of Molloy's description of the "rapture ...

in the motion crutches give" (*Mo* 60) as ironic is lent weight, retrospectively. Given that the rotunda containing Mahood's family is sealed, the mysterious paternity of his wife's children lightly echoes the overtones of incest which we noticed in *Molloy*. In the Mahood tale, these overtones are purely comic. Sexual gullibility resulting in ambiguous paternity is much exploited as a source of humour, and Mahood's naivety as he anticipates "clasp(ing) in my arms, both of which I had succeeded in preserving, my little ones born in my absence" (*U* 291) establishes him in the traditionally comic role of sexual dupe. At the same time his "success" in retaining his arms, as if limbs were likely to separate from trunks at any time, gives him a slapstick quality of improbable vulnerability. Incest here carries none of the weighty connotations of reintegration with the source of life which it did in *Molloy*. The subject has been trivialised in a way which, on reflection, highlights the delusiveness of the potentially meaningful act of incest in *Molloy*.

Mahood's journey most significantly redefines, through comic debasement, *Molloy*'s vital central symbol of hope and despair: the mother. In *Molloy*, she combines power and hostility with decrepitude and helplessness. She is *Molloy*'s link with the pre-natal and perhaps re-attainable state of intellectual catatonia and effortless biological functions - a paradise disturbed only by the happy possibility of an even more final annihilation - abortion. Mahood's goal, on the other hand, is an entire family, chattering about domestic issues in their profoundly stylised surroundings. The motives behind Mahood's quest are amusingly platitudinous: "Yonder is the nest you should never have left, there your dear absent ones are awaiting your return, patiently" (*U* 291). Occasionally this kind of sentiment gives way to acknowledged confusion: "A desirable goal, no, I never had time to dwell on that" (*U* 294). The terms which the Unnamable uses to describe Mahood's entry into the rotunda are unequivocally sexual:

When I penetrate into that house, if I ever do, it will be to go on turning, faster and faster, more and more convulsive, ... in the midst of my family all trying to embrace me at once, until by virtue of a supreme spasm I am catapulted in the opposite direction ... (U 294)

So in the Mahood story, the mother symbol of *Molloy*, the goal of the quest, is parodied in a family of exaggerated banality. This points up the inappropriateness of the symbol to the weight of significance with which Molloy invests it. The sexual terms in which Mahood's reunion is described reflect, once again, the incest theme of *Molloy* but in this case rejection - "catapulted in the opposite direction" - explicitly accompanies consummation. The final scene which the Unnamable insists on attributing to Mahood, the scene in which he concludes his journey in his mother's rotting entrails, comments strongly on the futility of the mother-quest. Mahood returns to the bowel rather than the womb. The journey home ends in defeat and the squalor of the physical. Unlike Molloy, Mahood is not permitted the consolation of self-delusion or evasion. Molloy is a narrator of questionable reliability. Through this parody, the Unnamable - himself an evasive narrator - offers one interpretation of Molloy's situation.

The Mahood story is an analytic spoof of *Molloy*, a derisive send-up of Molloy's half-articulated hopes. When self-parody is also mocking, it suggests that the artist may be forestalling the mockery of other critics, qualifying both his creation and his attachment to it through disclaiming responsibility for his creation as a serious work.

Both *Molloy* and *The Unnamable* are recounted by narrators whose main existential function is the creation of their fictions. The attempt of these narrators - or this single narrator - to come to

terms with this function automatically highlights the process of artistic creation. The Unnamable's parody, however, does highlight this process in a way which is paradigmatic of self-parody in general. In echoing *Molloy* the Unnamable directs us away from the world outside the work of art which is the trilogy, focussing his own and the reader's attention on the world of his own imaginative contrivance. In general, the way in which the self-parodist repeats his own construct, conversing artistically with an earlier self, isolates him from the world outside his creation. We might then expect the processes of that creation to absorb his imaginative energy. So self-parodic fiction demonstrates an awareness of its fictive nature. This awareness helps to construct an appropriate context for self-parody, but it is also symptomatic of the self-parodic work.

In this first chapter I have attempted, like Tristram Shandy,

to avoid all possible confusion ... to explain my
own meaning, and define, with all possible
exactness and precision, what I would willingly
be understood to mean ...⁴³

In brief, parody jolts the reader's perceptions about ideas, texts, conventions, idioms even (in the case of caricature) identities. In Beckett's fiction the fresh perceptions which it offers the reader are uncomfortable, because the ultimate function of parody in Beckett's fiction is to expose the delusiveness of comfort. To this end, existential (a meaning to life) and literary (the ability of art to reflect lived experience) certainties are disintegrated through parodic mockery. The following chapters analyse Beckett's incidental and sustained parody to establish the place held by parody

43. Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, London, Jonathan Lehmann (1948), p. 217. Tristram's definition of the term "nose", from which this quotation is taken, tends to defeat itself in tautology:

For by the word *Nose*, throughout all this long chapter of noses and in every part of my work, where the word *Nose* occurs, - I declare, by that word I mean a Nose, and nothing more, or less.

- although such a defeat is ironical, since it is clear that Sterne means more by "nose" than this suggests.

and the forms which are related to it in Beckett's fictional presentation of man's troubled relationship with himself, his surroundings and the constructs of his imagination.

SECTION II

THE POPULAR PARODIST WITH HIS SISTER AND SIX DAUGHTERS

Parody and Related Forms in Beckett's Fiction.

*Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful;
and the end of that mirth is heaviness.*

Proverbs, XIV, 13.

*There are but two subjects upon which one
may discourse with a free imagination, and
without the possibility of being controverted.
You may talk of your dreams; and you may tell
what you heard a parrot say. Both Morpheus
and the bird are incompetent witnesses; and
your listener dare not attack your recital.*

O. Henry, "An Unfinished Story".

CHAPTER II

EARLY FICTION

Beckett's first documented parody took the form of an undergraduate hoax, a purportedly serious critical investigation of a (fictitious) French literary movement, intended to entertain his fellows and to tease certain members of the Trinity College establishment. Deirdre Bair describes the parody and its circumstances:

He delivered a long, scholarly paper to the Modern Languages Society about a literary movement called "Le Concentrisme", led by one Jean du Chas, which was supposedly revolutionizing Parisian intellectual circles with its Rabelaisian humor and bawdy writing. He persuaded several of his friends to support the paper by reading other "examples" of "Concentrismiste" writing. The body of the membership, all serious scholars, spent the remainder of the meeting diligently discussing the possible literary merit of this shocking new school of writing. However "Le Concentrisme", which existed only in Beckett's imagination, was never heard of again after that evening ...¹

Apparently the parody was a success: those who took the paper seriously, then discovered its deception, were extremely upset and it seems likely that those who were in the know were as intensely amused. Bair also mentions another parody which Beckett instigated during his university years: as a lecturer at Trinity, he wrote and performed in a dramatic parody, the target of which, Bair tells us, was Corneille's *Le Cid*, which Beckett called *Le Kid*.² These incidents demonstrate an audacity and a facility with parody which is also present in much of Beckett's fiction. This chapter considers Beckett's use of parody (and related forms) from its manifestation in his very early fiction to its place in his first lengthy published work: *More Pricks than Kicks*.

1. Deirdre Bair, *A Biography: Samuel Beckett*, London, Jonathan Cape (1978), p. 50.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

The first pieces of fiction which Beckett saw into print were "Assumption",³ "*Che Sciagura*" (which has been authoritatively attributed to Beckett, although it does not appear under his name),⁴ "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*",⁵ "Text",⁶ and "A Case in a Thousand".⁷

Of these early works, "Assumption", which describes the tension between an artist, his work and his woman and "A Case in a Thousand", a grim story about mortality and helplessness, are not parodic. It is likely that "Text", a jaunty piece of Joycean wordplay, began as a straightforward and complimentary imitation of the style of the literary master. However now it reads like a parody of Joyce's prose: an unpunctuated sprawl of images and compound words, none of which coheres into a meaningful whole. "*Che Sciagura*" and "*Sedendo et Quiescendo*", on the other hand, are intentionally parodic works. The first is a superficially cryptic dialogue in the style of a formal debate. It is aimed at the excesses of psychological, scientific and philosophical language, and it contains some wonderful examples of pompously circumlocutive and pretentiously learned speech. For example a misunderstanding is called a "conceptual non-congruence".⁸ A disagreement, from the point of view of one speaker, is "the possibility of your cerebral reactions to certain terminological stimuli bearing to mine the relation of nucleus to nucleolus". Philosophical terms are also at the mercy of these speakers: "Empirical investigation has nothing to do with the psychology of gesture". The style of this debate amusingly contrasts with its surprising subject: the "spatial" or "qualitative elasticity"

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3. Samuel Beckett, "Assumption", in Eugene Jolas (ed.), *Transition Workshop*, New York, The Vanguard Press Inc. (1949), pp. 41-44. "Assumption" will be discussed in detail in the final chapter of this thesis.
 4. "D.E.S.C." (Samuel Beckett), "*Che Sciagura*", *T.D.C.: A College Miscellany*, V. 36 (November 14, 1929), p. 42.
 5. Samuel Beckett, "*Sedendo et Quiescendo*", *Transition*, V. 21 (March 1932), pp. 13-20.
 6. Samuel Beckett, "Text", *New Review*, V. 2 (April, 1932), p. 57.
 7. Samuel Beckett, "A Case in a Thousand", *The Bookman*, V. 86 (August, 1934), pp. 241-242.
 8. The brevity of these pieces of fiction makes the inclusion of page numbers for individual quotations unnecessary.

of condoms and the merits of sexual abstinence. "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*", a more complex and lengthy work, requires detailed discussion to draw out its strands of allusion, influence and parody.

"*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*"

"*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" was written before the unpublished novel "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" and later, like "Text", incorporated into that work. However "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" is far more characteristic of the overall style of "Dream" than "Text". Despite flaws which arise from over-enthusiastic and recondite word-play and allusion, it is significant for its virtuosity of parodic technique and the way parody contributes to "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" is largely representative of the way it works in "Dream".

Deirdre Bair has pointed out that the title is part of a phrase which occurs in Dante's *Purgatorio*: *sedendo et quiesciendo anima efficitur prudens*. She translates this as "sitting quietly the soul acquires wisdom".⁹ The title must be read ironically, since Beckett's story, agitatedly eclectic in form, describes an emotional lovers' rendezvous. The title exemplifies the allusive nature of the story, which continually refers us beyond and outside itself, so that it is a part of literary culture in a general sense (as a work of art in its own right) and at the same time it is attached by referential grappling hooks to previous manifestations of that culture. The plot may be summarised briefly: a young man meets his sweetheart on the platform of a railway station after a train journey, the couple catch a taxi to her home, they arrive. These events are described in prose dense with puns, snippets of parody, artistic, mythological and historical allusions, authorial self-consciousness and fragments of several languages. The tale describes itself as an "*erotic sostenutino*" - an Italian musical term signifying notes which are to be maintained beyond their normal value.

9. Deirdre Bair, *A Biography: Samuel Beckett*, p. 141.

The allusion is appropriate to such a wordy and lengthily sustained story. At one point the narrator, using another musical term, appeals to the reader (or perhaps to himself) to "let me off the *tutti* chords now". As a musical term *tutti* indicates that all performers are to join in. Indeed, "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" has the effect of a cacophonous jazz medley in which the melody is lost in the technical improvisation of too many instruments. The majority of readers may find themselves replying to the narrator's question "do you comprehend me?" (the syntax recalls the French *comprenez-vous?* or German *verstehen Sie?* in a way which is typical of more explicit cross-linguistic syntax play in this story) with the answer "with extraordinary difficulty". Beyond the problems of comprehension inherent in a story as flamboyantly allusive as "*Sedendo et Quiescendo*", parody and its related forms contribute significantly to this fictional meditation on the nature of the erotic.

In the beginning the narrator, travelling on a train during the Christmas season, anticipates a reunion with his sweetheart. The first paragraph establishes the sexual theme of the tale: even the purchase of a platform ticket: "Ten Pfenigs in such a dainty slot" has an erotic undercurrent. In this paragraph, too, cynicism intrudes. The relationship between the narrator and his girl is described as "the waning lust-affair". In case we had misread the tone, Beckett tosses in an allusion to two Mozart operas which concern the estrangement and reconciliation of lovers: "*Così fan tutte* with *The Magic Flute*". The references counterpoint each other. *Così fan tutte* centres on the fickleness of women whereas *The Magic Flute* is about lovers' constancy.¹⁰

It is significant that Beckett chose *The Magic Flute* to suggest an ideal of fidelity, since in this opera music (Tamino's flute and Papagino's bells) has the power to ward off danger and

10. See J. Walker McSpadden, *Opera Synopses: a Guide to the Plots and Characters of the Standard Operas*, London, George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd. (1953), pp. 40-41, 135-137.

evoke the beloved. As we have seen, the narrative of "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" describes itself in musical terms, but the magical qualities of this music are all reductive: the danger over which the narrator triumphs is the danger of espousing sentimentality and lofty ideals - of *celebrating* love - and the image of the beloved which the narrative evokes is scarcely flattering. Moreover the narrator himself, unlike Prince Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, is a diffident and equivocal suitor. The reference to *The Magic Flute*, then, is ironic, while the allusion to *Così Fan Tutte* implies that the girl is part of the capricious *genus* of femininity which Don Alfonso describes and excuses at the conclusion of the opera - as far as infidelity goes, *Così fan tutte*: "So do they all".

After this introductory preamble, the girl is described walking along the platform of the railway station "like a Gozzi-Epstein". Beckett is probably referring to Carlo Gozzi, a Venetian satirist, playwright and vehement supporter of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, who lived toward the end of the eighteenth century when the *commedia* was losing ground. Gozzi's connection with the *commedia* - a theatrical form characterised by grotesque, almost bestial masks, unpredictability (in the form of impromptu improvisations, or *lazzi*), and popular appeal - informs the allusion. The girl's vulgar sensuality (described, later, with some explicitness) has an element of grotesque bestiality.¹¹ Gozzi's later plays were re-workings of fairy tales, so possibly Beckett also intends the reference to suggest that the girl has a fabulous quality. "Epstein" possibly alludes to the modern sculptor, Jacob Epstein, whose figurative work is remarkable for a quality of plasticity and intense characterisation within the apparently

11. Edith Kern has written on the connection between Beckett's theatre and the *Commedia*: "Beckett and the Spirit of the *Commedia dell'arte*", *Modern Drama*, V. 9 (December, 1966), pp. 260-267.

inflexible medium of solid materials. With this reference, Beckett may be making an authorially self-conscious point about the mobility of a character within the rigidity of narrative form. At the same time the allusion to Epstein suggests the intensity - verging, once again, on grotesquerie - of the girl's individual character. German syntax (and coinage) identify the general location of the railway station and characterise the nationality of the girl, who is clutching her platform ticket "that yet ten Pfenigs cost had". The girl is primally sinful, her walk "insist(s) on the Garden of Eden in Mammy's fur coat". Here an elevated image ("Eden") is travestied by its proximity to banality ("Mammy's fur coat") and it is clear that connotations of feminine betrayal are to carry more weight than the implicit comparison between her body and Edenic paradise. Garden imagery is extended during the course of the description. She is fruitful and capacious, her buttocks are "two great melons", her pelvis is a "tremendous bowl", a "bulb", and when Beckett writes of her "sheath (presumably vaginal) within sheath (of the fur coat) and the missing (probably phallic) sword" the multi-layered form of a bulb or corm is again suggested. The colloquial comment that "she won't need no Lupercus" refers to the Roman fertility festival, the *Lupercalia*. However these images of fruitful sexuality are not presented approvingly. The narrator undermines his description by remarking that her legs were "not alas reasonably exciting" and the narrative tone, in general, is one of distaste rather than celebration. Such cultural and mythological allusions recur throughout the text, establishing the tone of cynicism towards women, sentiment and love.

The use of the narrator in this story is significant from the point of view of both allusion and parody. For instance, immediately after the above reference the narrator shifts into the third person for a description of the male character lighting a cigarette, thus further distancing himself from the emotional content of the story. (The narrator switches from first to third person throughout the tale, but his female character is never

accorded a voice of her own). The couple embrace (or rather it is likely that they embrace; this is the first instance of erudition confusing the sequence of events in the narrative) and the narrator mentions "love-glue" - an image which is repeated and extended in *Malone Dies*, when Macmann's poems describe love as "a kind of lethal glue" (MD 241). Their greetings parody the conventional cries of reunited lovers in hack-written romances: "At last!" "Beloved!". This is comically punctured by the practical and banal exclamation of "Taxi!", then the curious "*Vie de taxi*" and a return to the parodically conventional, with "*Je t'adore à l'égal*". A little later the narrator intrudes with a self-conscious criticism of the text: "*Nonsens unique*" - which is ironic, given the allusive nature of the work - and an instructive comment for the "Gentle reader". This phrase has become such a cliché of authorial intrusions in nineteenth century fiction that its use here may be considered parodic in the sense that the narrator is sending up his intrusion (and authorial interruptions in general) by referring to the - now somewhat debased - hallmark of intrusive narrators, possibly in the romance genre.

In the paragraphs which follow the non-naturalistic style is amplified, with direct appeals to the reader, musical terms, multiple allusions, Joycean wordplay and the mention of a poem which the narrator wrote before the current work. The characters are named in a way which contributes to such a cultural, as opposed to naturalistic, tone. The male is introduced as Belacqua. Many critics have traced his name to Dante's *Purgatorio* where he originally appears as a lazy and indecisive lute-player. The girl is Smeraldina-Rima - an Italianate name which sounds similar to those of the stereotypical characters from the *commedia dell'arte*. A lengthy description of Smeraldina-Rima emphasises still further the alignment of text and character with the world of art. This also flows into the first of several parodic narrative voices in "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*".

The description itself has a painterly quality, not only because the girl is compared to a Madonna, or because the narrator provides a critique of his narrative technique as "a tendency to use up any odds and ends of pigment", but because the description itself suggests an awareness of weight and form. Her jaw is a "full firm undershot prispism" (the image mingles sensuality and a consciousness of physical structure). She has a "wedgehead". The reduction of a head to a geometric shape is reminiscent of cubist painterly technique, and we are reminded that Beckett regarded Braque as one of "the great artists of our time".¹² The narrator punctures his description by pointing out the constraints of narrative form: "We are sorry to say that lack of space obliges us regretfully to exclude from this chronicle ...". This is done with such conscious pomposity and dislocation from context that it becomes a parodic reference to the inflated rhetoric, and to inside information withheld, which is a feature of unskilled authorial intrusion in general. The narrator then shifts his perspective, remarking on the impression which a fictional aesthete, "Mr. John Kissmearse", would receive of Smeraldina-Rima. The amusingly named Mr Kissmearse and his affected "Orchids", would be reminded of;

his Perpetually Succourful Lady, as she positively must have appeared on two probationary occasions: *primo*, pinned, there's no other word for it, to her loggia by the shining sage-femme: *secondo*, confined, by Thermidor, in the interests of her armpits, to her bathroom, shamed in mind, yes, and yet - grieving for the doomed olives.

These two scenes parody the Italianate and quasi-religious secular - or indeed religious - canvases which were in vogue in the late nineteenth century and somewhat later. The first is a debased version of the Annunciation, the second suggests countless variations

12. Samuel Beckett, "MacGreevey on Yeats", *Irish Times* (August 4, 1945), p. 2.

on the lady-at-her-toilette theme. At the same time, the posture of the sycophantic aesthete is caricatured. Mr Kissmearse's voice is reproduced in two phrases: "she positively must have appeared" and "Yes, and yet - " to produce immediacy in this vignette of an appreciator of culture. The connotations of "probationary" hint that there is more to religion, and perhaps art, than sentiment and scenic composition. The irony implicit in drawing a comparison between the sensual Smeraldina-Rima and the Virgin is reinforced by the Kissmearse perspective, a perspective which is subsequently explicitly reviled by the narrator: "that class of egoterminal immaculate quackery and dupery gives me the sick properly". However he concludes his description of Smeraldina-Rima's appearance with another reference to religious art: "she looked like a parrot in a Pieta, a pietra serena parrot". So Smeraldina-Rima is like an incongruity - a parrot - in a religious setting. Parrots mimic without comprehension, but Smeraldina-Rima is compared to a mute, "pietra serena" parrot: sculpturally silent. Perhaps Beckett means to suggest in her an exotically mindless, misleadingly pious quality.

A few lines later the narrator describes the relationship between Belacqua and Smeraldina-Rima in another parodically assumed voice: the hearty booming tones which we might associate with a gentleman's club (perhaps stimulated by an earlier reference to Smeraldina's pith-helmet - "*casco*" - of a hat). This caricature of the British county attitude speaks as follows:

By Jove when I look back and think how chaste was the passion of mutual attraction that juxtaposed those two young people in the first instance. Its out of the question to give you any idea of the reverence with which they - how shall I say? - *clave* the one to the other in an ecstasy and an agony! A sentimental coagulum, sir, that biggers description.

The naivety of the speaker is implicit: whatever the origins of the relationship between Belacqua and Smeraldina-Rima, at the time

of which the narrator writes their "attraction" is far from "chaste". The voice slips into a Joycean vowel-switch ("biggers description") and increasingly adopts this Joycean tone as it blends into the general narrative, describing Belacqua's attempts to express his love in poetry: "(Belacqua) inscribed to his darling blue flower some of the finest Night of May hiccupsobs that ever left a fox's paw sneering and rotting in a snaptrap". The "blue flower" associates Smeraldina-Rima with the Virgin, once again, since blue is Mary's colour. "Night of May" recalls *A Midsummer Night's Dream* - another tale of love and resistance to love (although here the similarity ends: Beckett, unlike Shakespeare, does not offer resolution and happiness through the fates of his characters). The final image of the fox's paw suggests that love is a trap, from which the most cunning can only extricate themselves by leaving a part of themselves behind: the emotional equivalent of chewing off one's paw to liberate one's body. An example of Belacqua's poetry is given:

At last I find in my confuséd soul,
 Dark with the dark flame of the cypresses,
 The certitude that I cannot be whole,
 Consummate, finally achieved, unless
 I be consumed and fused in the white heat
 Of her sad finite essence, so that none
 Shall sever us who are at last complete,
 Eternally, irrevocably one,
 One with the birdless cloudless colourless skies,
 One with the bright purity of the fire
 Of which we are and for which we must die
 A strange exalted death and be entire,
 Like two merged stars, intolerably bright,
 Cojoined in One and in the Infinite!

This is immediately followed by another parodically assumed voice, debasing the sentiments of the poem through conscious banality.

This time the voice is unmistakably Irish:

Lilly Neary has a lovely Gee and her poor
 Paddy got his B.A. and by the holy fly I wouldn't
 recommend you to ask me what class of tree they
 were under when he put his hand on her and
 enjoyed that.

The Irish voice duplicates and counterpoints essential images in Belacqua's poem: the profane colloquialism of "by the holy fly" contrasts with the spiritual infinity celebrated in the poem and the "class of tree" under which Lilly Neary enjoys her Paddy refers back to Belacqua's "cypresses". At the same time Paddy and his B.A. seem to amusingly disparage the erudition of the narrator.

Lawrence E. Harvey has traced Belacqua's poem to a sonnet which Beckett wrote to a German friend¹³ and this perhaps explains why the sonnet, taken out of context, lacks the sardonic tone which characterises the narrator of "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" and which (from the narrator's descriptions of Belacqua, as well as his partial identification with the character) we might expect Belacqua to adopt. Private love sonnets, whatever their later fate, are unlikely to have a derisively parodic or ironic quality.

The poem itself is a secular treatment of death, resurrection and apotheosis. The use of religious language to describe clearly erotic experience recalls Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet sequence, *The House of Life*. The meditation on immortality through love is also reminiscent of Shakespeare's sonnets. However, Shakespearean poetic self-consciousness – the sonneteer's awareness of the durability of his medium – is absent from Belacqua's poem, although the rest of *Sedendo et Quiesciendo* (especially the parodic authorial intrusions) displays a form of literary self-consciousness: a play with the narrative as narrative. If Belacqua's sonnet were to be consistent in tone with the rest of "*Sedendo et Quiescendo*", we might expect it to have an ironical and referential quality, perhaps similar to Shakespeare's CXXX sonnet, which begins: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun ..." and implicitly refers us to the

13. Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, p. 283.

"false compare" practised by other, less clear-sighted poets, who use overblown rhetoric and exaggerated metaphors. However Belacqua's sonnet, in itself, is not self-conscious, referential, ironic or exaggerated. It is a genre piece. Taken in context, however, it becomes an ironic parody of the love sonnet genre. Belacqua's sonnet is prefaced by the authoritative voice of the narrator, offering images which suggest that constraint, threat and loss are the products of love. It is followed by a profane parodic voice which debases the erotic, reducing it to a subject for voyeuristic gossip and speculation ("I wouldn't recommend you to ask me what class of a tree they were under when he put his hand on her and enjoyed that"). Moreover the entire story explores, on one level, the tension between revulsion and desire. So the context of Belacqua's sonnet ironically contrasts with the sentiments expressed in the sonnet itself: far from suggesting the possibility of unity and wholeness through fusion with the love-object, the context points to loss of the self, disgust with the physical, and (by suggestion) infidelity. By embedding an idealistic sonnet in an iconoclastic setting, Beckett alters the status of that sonnet, ironically undermining its authority by contrast with its surroundings. At the same time, since the sonnet is such a traditional example of its genre, we are (by association) referred back to that genre itself, and it is implied that all sonnets which celebrate ecstasy through love may be dubious, falsifications of an ambiguous and possibly dangerous actuality.

The rest of "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" follows the allusive, parodic, cross-linguistic and derisive pattern which has been established in the earlier pages. It is an eclectic work, in which heterogeneous references ricochet off one another. The effect, however, is more likely to be irritating than culturally enriching, since much of the allusion appears gratuitous. The word "*casco*", for example, appears to have little advantage over the English translation: pith-helmet. We are reminded of the pretentiousness of The Polar Bear, a character in *More Pricks than Kicks*, who

"never used the English word when the foreign pleased him better" (MPK 54). An example of this pretentiousness occurs when the narrator reminisces briefly about a poem he wrote: "Crémieux hold your saliva and you, Curtius, I have a note on Anteros I believe, in fact I seem to remember I once wrote a poem ...". "Crémieux" was an historical figure, Isaac Adolphe Crémieux, a French politician and lawyer of the eighteenth century who did much for the political rights of Jews (he was, himself, Jewish).¹⁴ Beckett's biographer maintains that the Irish/German girl, Peggy Sinclair, on whom Beckett based his Smeraldina, had Jewish parentage. So the reference to an eminent Jewish statesman of the previous century has a kind of internal, personal logic. Beckett is perhaps suggesting that Smeraldina-Rima needs no championship. "Curtius" may refer to Georg Curtius, a philologist who popularised French (and other European) literature in Germany. "Anteros" was an early martyred Pope, now canonised, whose feast day is the third of January - close to the date when the events described in "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" take place. So a political, a linguistic and a religious allusion, each with its own slight relevance to the text, sit uneasily together in the narrator's prose. While they may allow us to imagine the kind of poem which is the narrator's true subject in this sentence, they obscure, rather than illuminate, the narrative. The same may be said for much of the allusion in "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*". Although Beckett, in his essay on Joyce, (which was written slightly before "*Sedendo et Quiescendo*") scorned the average reader, and although, in "Three Dialogues", he praised the opaque work of art, there is a difference between obscurity and valid artistic complexity. References which are personal to the point of idiosyncrasy, or which bear only a tenuous connection with the text, may be criticised.

14. Information on these men is taken from their respective entries in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* Micropaedia Vol I, Vol III, Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. (1983), pp. 232, 308, 408.

The same criticisms cannot be levelled at another form of allusion in "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*": the parodies. The consistent function of these parodies is derisive, and each contributes, in a slightly different way, to a perspective which is negative. The effect of the parodies of narrative conventions, such as the romantic dialogue between Belacqua and Smeraldina-Rima at the railway station or the inflated authorial interjections, is one of ridicule through the exaggerated imitation of conventionally established styles. The authorial intrusions are especially interesting. We are given parodic intrusions (the address to the "gentle reader" and the remark about "lack of space ... (in) this chronicle") and, later, intrusions which do not refer us to the established conventions of authorial intrusion and which are, therefore, not parodic. (The comment "no, no, I *won't* say everything, I *won't* tell you everything" is an example of authorial self-consciousness which is not parodic.) So a contrast is implicitly set up between the consciously exaggerated and pompous spoofs of interjections, and the simplicity, even desperation, of the straight interjections. This ensures that the narrator's parodic asides will not be confused with a clichéd use of the technique of narrative intrusion, but will be read as parodies of such clichés. Moreover the straight interjections, in which the narrator directly conveys his struggle with the necessity to shape, order and edit his raw material, acquire force and authority by comparison with earlier spoofs of the same narrative technique.

Belacqua's poem is another parody of an established convention: the sonnet. However this parody works, not through exaggeration, but through a sudden dislocation of narrative: a switch from the allusive, Joycean introduction which establishes the misfortune of love (in the eyes of the narrator) into a standard sonnet celebrating the transcendence of love, then back into prose which brings us firmly down to earth (almost literally, if we consider the ground beneath the trees, on which Paddy and Lilly are reported to copulate). So rather than actually deriding the sonnet genre by including an exaggeratedly ridiculous example of a sonnet, Beckett has chosen to

disillusion the reader by situating a conventional sonnet in a context which diminishes its credibility. This casts doubts on the conventions of the genre of the love sonnet.

With the caricatured voices of the aesthete, the British gentleman and the Irish gossip, we have a far less gentle parodic approach. Once again, exaggeration is used to ridicule and debunk. A distinction exists between parodies of artistic conventions, which form part of a network of literary self-consciousness in "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*", and parodies of certain characters, which refer us, not to an artistic tradition, but to personality types which are to be found in the world at large. This distinction may be traced in parodies throughout Beckett's early and mature fiction. Yet both kinds of parody, more than any other artistic element of "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*", turn the work into a *sostenutino* of the conflicts and ridiculousness of the erotic.

Another feature of "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" which is amplified in Beckett's later fiction is the impression we receive of the discreteness of individuality. The ideal of love as a unifying force, which Belacqua's poem celebrates, is undermined throughout the work. However, this alienation extends beyond the relationship between the lovers. The narrator clearly does not intend Smeraldina-Rima to achieve the significance of Belacqua, whose perspective is, at times, that of the narrator himself. The narrator distances himself from Belacqua in a different way: his identification with his male character is only occasional and incomplete. This fractures the accord between narrator and character. The non-parodic authorial intrusions also contribute to an attitude of estrangement between individuals. The narrator has an ambiguous relationship with his reader. When he directly addresses us, he is, at times, conscious of his role as a conveyer of information (he remarks that "it'd be hard for you to understand my meaning", then obligingly clarifies this meaning for us) but he also uses his power to deny the reader access to information ("I *won't* tell you everything"). In short,

"*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" is, in one sense, about the partiality of human interaction.

More Pricks than Kicks

More Pricks than Kicks continues in the amusing, parodic and culturally aware vein of "*Sedendo et Quiescendo*". However, the later work is comparatively accessible: the narrative viewpoint is consistent (within each story) and allusion is well integrated into the text. Parodies in *More Pricks than Kicks* take the form of generalised caricatures - that is, exaggerated versions of personality types - for which the prototype is Mr John Kissmearse. *More Pricks than Kicks* is also rich in incidental parody. Varieties of literary parody, including self-parody, figure prominently as well. Parody contributes to comedy in this work; indeed the most appealing quality of *More Pricks than Kicks* is its blend of humour and sadness within a traditionally festive comic framework. This festive pattern is exemplified by repeated marriages; when Belacqua dies during his third marriage his widow, also called Smeraldina, is equipped with a fresh suitor, anticipating another wedding in the chain of couplings which progresses throughout the stories. It seems appropriate, then, to introduce parody in *More Pricks than Kicks* with a brief discussion of humour.

One of the funniest descriptions in *More Pricks than Kicks* occurs in the first story of the collection, "Dante and the Lobster", when Belacqua prepares his eccentric lunch with disproportionately fierce energy:

Toast must not on any account be done too rapidly. For bread to be toasted as it ought, through and through, it must be done on a mild steady flame. Otherwise you only charred the outsides and left the pith as sodden as before. If there was one thing he abominated more than another, it was to feel his teeth meet in a bathos of pith and dough. ... He laid his cheek against the soft of the bread, it was spongy and warm, alive. But he would very soon take that plush feel off it, by God but he would very quickly take that fat white look off its face. . (MPK 10-11)

The first two sentences parody the measured tones of conventional culinary instructions. However, the momentum of the bizarre rapidly accelerates as comic incongruity intrudes. A term generally used in aesthetic judgements ("bathos") is attributed to underdone toast and bread is personified, assuming a repugnant ("fat", "white") vulnerability, which, in view of its fate - the grill - is shockingly funny. Belacqua burns the toast to charcoal and applies mustard, salt and pepper. His culinary technique is interesting, not only for its comic vehemence, but for the way in which it is analogous to the narrative tone of *More Pricks than Kicks* as a whole. In this work, the reader is in no danger of meeting with the soft whiteness of sentimentality or lofty ideals. Travesty, the deliberate and mocking reduction to banality, appears rather than bathos (with its connotations of unintentional authorial lapse into the banal), and any potential sentimentality or vulnerability is scorched black with bitter humour. For example in "Love and Lethe", Belacqua contracts a suicide pact with a neurasthenic terminal case called Ruby Tough. The first shot from his revolver misses Ruby, but in a nice inversion of the traditional connection between orgasm and death, the shot triggers a sexual embrace. Belacqua has prepared a suicide note which reads "TEMPORARILY SANE" (MPK 88). However, the grimness of this message is overlaid with levity: the message is, ignominiously enough, painted on a discarded number-plate. This travesties Belacqua's studied *Weltschmerz* - yet at the same time the message is comically reinforced: if suicide is the essential act for the sane, then Belacqua's single bout of sanity has indeed been temporary.

Descriptions of Belacqua's lunch also initiate macabre imagery in *More Pricks than Kicks*: Belacqua cuts his bread on the newsprint photograph of a convicted murderer; and in preparing his toast before acquiring its filling, he is said to "put the horse behind the tumbrel" (MPK 12). The substitution of tumbrel for cart adds a black twist to an old saying. At the same time the motif of

execution (of the murderer and the lobster of the title) is reinforced. Similarly the gorgonzola which completes Belacqua's assembled sandwich is described as a "cadaverous tablet of cheese between the hard cold black boards of the toast" (MPK 13). Execution and decay are inappropriately macabre images to be associated with lunch, however unappetising. Yet the very incongruity of these images makes them comical in the reverse of the way in which Belacqua's suicide sign is comical: the sign is a potentially profound statement made funny by the banality of its situation, whereas here an apparently banal incident (the preparation of lunch) is incongruously invested with the weight of macabre death imagery. Such intentional mismatching is characteristic of the humour Beckett uses in *More Pricks than Kicks*. For example, Belacqua bitterly castigates the grocer who sells him what he assumes is inferior gorgonzola. The grocer responds with a totally disproportionate "wild crucified gesture of supplication" (MPK 13). The crucifixion image, with its connotations of sacrifice, of necessary suffering, is echoed at the conclusion of the story, when the lobster which is destined to be boiled alive for Belacqua's dinner is an "exposed cruciform" (MPK 18). Macabre humour occurs throughout *More Pricks than Kicks*. To give another example, in "Yellow", Belacqua, waiting in hospital to have an anthrax and a toe removed, pleads for his cat to have his amputated flesh. Shortly before his death on the operating table, Belacqua, attempting to disguise his terror, decides to:

... arm his mind with laughter, laughter is not quite the word but it will have to serve, at every point, then he would admit the idea and blow it to pieces. Smears, as after a gorge of blackberries, of hilarity, which is not quite the word either, would be adhering to his lips as he stepped smartly, ohne Hast aber ohne Rast, into the torture-chamber. (MPK 150)

The qualification of "laughter" and "hilarity" is an early manifestation of the linguistic precision of later Beckett narrators. In this context, as in others, it undermines the veracity of the

text, introducing the reader to doubts about narrative accuracy: if "laughter" and "hilarity" are words which are not quite satisfactory to the narrator, why did he not find more appropriate words? And if these words are the most appropriate possible, are they not close enough to his intended meaning to stand without qualification? With these doubts in mind, the most the reader can do is take the qualified words for a close approximation of the narrator's meaning. For Belacqua, then, something like laughter is a weapon against pain and despair. Nietzsche expressed the same general idea in his remark that "man alone suffers so excruciatingly that he was compelled to invent laughter".¹⁵ However, the narrator of *More Pricks than Kicks* makes his point from within the apparently authoritative context of a comic work itself. There follows one of those amusingly incongruous images which continually enliven *More Pricks than Kicks*: laughter is identifiable - like blackberry stains - about the mouth of the recent laugher. As well as his seemingly protective humour, Belacqua is armed with a German platitude counselling moderation: he will progress into the operating theatre without haste, but without pause. It so happens that humour gives no protection; Belacqua is not preserved, either from fear and anticipated pain, or from death itself: an error on the part of the anaesthetist kills him. Moreover, in the milieu of macabre humour in *More Pricks than Kicks*, pain, death and humour are closely associated. Given the protection that Belacqua seeks in laughter, it is highly ironic that his shrouded corpse resembles "a pantomime baby" (MPK 168): a character in a ritual and festive comedy.

Incidental characters in *More Pricks than Kicks* add further grim humour to the text, suggesting pathos and debasement which is (just) laughable. Some of these characters predict situations

15. Nietzsche, quoted by P. Keith-Spiegel in Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (eds), *The Psychology of Humour*, New York, Academic Press (1972), p. 20.

and characters in Beckett's later work. In "Fingal" a bestial "herd" (MPK 27) of lunatics, whose movements are regulated to the point of comic mechanisation by warders' whistles, foreshadow the asylum inmates of *Malone Dies*. In "Ding-dong" we meet a furious beggar who is the prototype (in thrift and ingenuity) of the narrator of "The End". Blind and paralytic, this beggar is composing a vitriolic castigation of the even more unfortunate sighted and mobile man who has arrived late to wheel the beggar home.

Debased by a different kind of poverty, the partying intellectuals of "A Wet Night" are caricatures, mouthpieces for parodies of erudite conversation. For example, a "Professor of Bullscrit and Comparative Ovidology" holds forth in a parody of academic pomposity: "'When the immortal Byron' he bombed 'was about to leave Ravenna, to sail in search of some distant shore where a hero's death might end his immortal spleen ...'" (MPK 62). The confusion between immortality and death makes nonsense of the professor's speech. Parodies such as these, intended as mockery of arcane knowledge, anticipate the mockeries of learning in texts which follow *More Pricks than Kicks*. Among the caricatures in "A Wet Night" is "a popular parodist with his sister and six daughters" (MPK 61). The parodist, unfortunately, melts into the general hubbub. (Speeches, attributed to a proclaimed parodist, in a story where most conversation is parodic, would have made interesting reading.) The parodist's entry with his sister and six daughters suggests a prolific and incestuous nature. Since he is identified only by his craft, these connotations attach themselves to parody. Later in the story this suggestion of incest is mitigated when his sister mentions her nieces, while discussing the Alba, Belacqua's sweetheart. Implicitly, then, parody is akin to malicious gossip. In *More Pricks than Kicks* the purpose of parody is amusing mockery, tinged, at times, with malice, and at times recondite to the point of inbreeding.

The simplest parodies in *More Pricks than Kicks* are of the most basic and ephemeral type: conversational mockery of certain

personality types by imitating the quirks in their patterns of speech.¹⁶ So in "Fingal", Belacqua, to amuse himself and his companion, Winnie, assumes the exaggerated voice of a "travelled spinster" anxious to display her familiarity with the Continent: "'You don't say you were in Milan (to rime with villain) and never saw the Cena?'" (MPK 23). The attempt to Italianize pronunciation underlines the pretentiousness of the posture of the veteran traveller. In "Draff" Hairy Quin uses the same method to effectively ridicule the jaunty, mercenary parson who, early in the story, has attempted to comfort Smeraldina (Belacqua's widow) with a concentrated barrage of platitudes so banal that they immediately identify him as a caricature of his profession, like the leading character in the joke which Belacqua tells himself shortly before he dies, in which a parson, quibbling about repeating the lines "'By God! I'm shot'" in an amateur theatrical production, blasphemes fluently when a revolver is accidentally fired on stage. Dead, Belacqua is buried by the joke-parson central to this and other "sottish jests" (MPK 156) - a parson replete with stock answers to the ultimate mystery: "'Automatic dispensation' he cried. 'Strength from on high' snapping his thumb 'like that. Meet in Paradize.'" (MPK 164). However, the parson does not have the last word. Hairy Quin, Belacqua's best man and something of his deputy (after Belacqua's death, Hairy discharges his nuptial duties) ousts the parson from the funeral car, then turns to the widow: "'Wouldn't he give you the sick' said Hairy 'with his Noo Gefoozleum'" (MPK 172). The victims of this kind of derision are examples of a slightly more complex variety of parody which is common in *More Pricks than Kicks*: caricature.

Beckett caricatures stereotypical human categories - such as the intellectual, the bluestocking and the parson - rather than specific individuals. An identifiable social group is singled out,

16. An entire chapter of *More Pricks than Kicks*, "The Smeraldina's Billet-Doux", falls into this parodic category. Smeraldina's letter is discussed in depth in the final chapter of this thesis.

the most affected or unpleasant of their characteristics is distilled, and a character who is the vessel for this silliness or nastiness (or both) is introduced into the text. Some of these caricatures in *More Pricks than Kicks* are very fleeting - mocking the traits of entire social groups in the person of one incisively and economically drawn individual. For example in "Love and Lethe" Mr Tough, the father of Belacqua's intended suicide partner, is the quintessence of all diligent but resentful wage-slaves as he sourly witnesses Belacqua's departure in a borrowed car: "Mr Tough crept to the window and peeped out from behind the curtain. He had worked himself to the bone for his family and he could only afford a safety-bicycle. A bitter look stole over his cyanosis" (MPK 84). In this story, Belacqua is the *picaresque* whose actions antagonise respectable members of society.¹⁷

However amusing passing targets such as Mr Tough may be, the sustained and vituperative caricatures in *More Pricks than Kicks* give more insight into the direction of the narrator's concerns. When these caricatures are of writers, the narrator is tacitly stating his own position in relation to his craft, by the negative technique of lampooning a creative stance which he considers untenable. Early in "A Wet Night" Belacqua contemplates the statue of Tommy Moore, the controversial and popular Irish (or Anglo-Irish) poet, satirist and songwriter. Belacqua's admiration is not wasted on Moore's verse, rather, he is considering the proportions of the statue's "bull neck" (MPK 48). This irreverence establishes the tone for the caricature of "the Poet" later in the story. The Poet, in his Donegal tweeds, with his "homespun" air and his "politico-ploughboy" friend, represents those modern Irish poets who have

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17. *More Pricks than Kicks* has affinities, such as episodic form, comic tone and a rogue hero, with the picaresque novel. Ruby Cohn makes this connection in *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press (1962), p. 18. See too Raymond Federman, in *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*, Berkeley, University of California Press (1965), p. 33.

felt, or affected, an affinity with the peasantry. Beckett captures this especially sardonically with the image he uses to describe the Poet's delight at meeting Belacqua: "He gave the impression of having lost a harrow and found a figure of speech" (MPK 50). The image also points up the subordination of reality (the harrow) to art (the figure of speech) in the estimation of the Poet. This is reinforced in the next few lines, when the Poet tries to interest Belacqua in joining him for a drink: "'Now' exulted the Poet, as though he had just brought an army across the Beresina, 'give it a name and knock it back'" (MPK 50). This toast implies that language must even be applied to a drink before consumption. The reference to the Beresina compounds the ridicule of the Poet - crossing the Beresina sounds very similar to crossing the Rubicon, but while the Rubicon has connotations of irrevocability, the Beresina is associated with defeat: Napoleon sustained great losses crossing it as he retreated from Moscow. But the Poet is more than a caricature of a particular Irish literary type. His title suggests both self-importance and the representation of an entire class of literary artist. And when we see him alone, putting together and rehearsing a poem which he will recite with false spontaneity before a gathering in a literary salon - "he had to have it pat in order not to have to say it pat" (MPK 57) - he becomes the embodiment of a certain kind of pompously inauthentic artistry in general. An element of self-consciousness and self-definition is fundamental to the situation in which a writer creates another writer and shows this creation in the act of composition. In this instance the quotation of the Poet's work introduces a more complex form of parody than caricature. The poem reads as follows:

Calvary by Night

the water
the waste of water

in the womb of water
an pansy leaps.

rocket of bloom flare flower of night wilt for me
on the breasts of the water it has closed it has made

an act of floral presence on the water
 the tranquil act of its cycle on the waste
 from the spouting forth
 to the re-enwombing
 untroubled bow of petaline sweet-smellingness
 kingfisher abated
 drowned for me
 lamb of insustenance mine

till the clamour of a blue bloom
 beat on the walls of the womb of
 the waste of
 the water (MPK 57)

This poem shows the influence of the *Ithaca* section of *Ulysses*, where Bloom is described as "water-lover, drawer of water, watercarrier".¹⁸ The poem is not overtly silly, like Grehan's poem in *Watt*. However, the Poet has been described with such detailed and comic derision – even down to his very short hair which has "the austerity of a rat's back" (MPK 56) that we are alert to the ridiculous. The incongruity of the leaping pansy and the noisy bloom fulfill our expectations. However "Calvary by Night" is more than comic or otiose versifying. Lawrence E. Harvey has shown that this is a re-working of a poem which first appeared in Beckett's earlier, unpublished work: "Dream of Fair to Middling Women". The poem has suffered in transition:

'Bow of petal and fragrance' in the original becomes 'bow of petalline sweet-smellingness'. 'Lamb of insustenance' becomes 'lamb of insustenance mine'; 'blue flower' becomes the comical 'blue bloom'. The title 'Calvary by Night', which remains unchanged in the later version, may well suggest everyman's hard journey through the darkness of life to his destiny as victim, but it can also slip towards the satirical, for it is vaguely reminiscent of travel posters advertising tourist delights: 'see Paris by Night'.¹⁹

So Beckett has travestied his own poem by altering certain images for the worse, and by relocating it in an unsympathetic context. This is self-parody: Beckett gently mocking his earlier poetic

18. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books (1968), p. 592.

19. Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, p. 275.

expression by attributing a travesty of that expression to a caricature of poetic inauthenticity.

Various kinds of internal parody are also at work in "What a Misfortune", the tale of Belacqua's marriage to Thelma bbogs, a plain but sensual girl of considerable financial expectations. Belacqua's contribution to the guest list is curtailed by his family's disapproval of a marriage undertaken by such a recent widower (Belacqua is reminded that his first wife, Lucy, is scarcely cold.) The two representatives who do attend, "a female cousin, so remote as to be scarcely credible, and a kind of moot Struldbrug" (MPK 116) exemplify the features of Beckett's early portrayal of minor comic characters: a one-dimensional quality, beyond the natural or plausible, a quality which arises from the extreme exaggeration of tics and traits; and a marked disparity between these quirks and the situation in which the comic characters find themselves. Belacqua's relatives are startlingly incongruous as wedding guests:

two grotesques, seated far apart: Jimmy the Duck Skyrm, an aged cretin, outrageous in pepper and salt, Lavalliere and pullover, gnashing his teeth without ceasing at invisible spaghetti; and Hermione. Näutzche, a powerfully built nymphomaniac panting in black and mauve between shipped crutches. ... Little does she dream what a flurry she has set up in the spirits of Skyrm, as he gobbles and mumbles the air at the precise remove of enchantment behind her (MPK 123-124).

During the wedding ceremony, Jimmy moves closer to Hermione:

and there, under cover of a kinsman's seasonable emotion, (he) rooted and snuffled his way into her affections with a sulline avidity ... (MPK 126)

The description of the chemistry of attraction at work between Jimmy and Hermione parodies the wedding itself, since the wedding is the formalisation of such an attraction.

A more literary type of parody is used when the narrator turns his attention to Walter Draffin, a clerk in the Lands Commission with a heavyweight aesthetic sensibility. Draffin is the lover of Belacqua's new mother-in-law and therefore he is possibly Thelma's natural father. At the wedding reception he proposes a grandiose yet fussy toast which is a concentrated example of the mock-heroic:

'I raise this glass ... this glorious bumper, on behalf of those present and the many prevented by age, sickness, infirmity or previous engagement from being with us, to you, dearest Thelma, whom we all love, and to you, Mr. Shuah, who Thelma loving and being loved of her we all love too I feel sure, now on the threshold of your bliss, and to such and so many consummations, earthly and other, as you have in mind. ...

I close these eyes ... and I see them in that memorable island, Avalon, Atlantis, Hesperides, Ui Breasail, I don't insist, lapped in the Siamese haecceity of puffect love, revelling in the most delightful natural surroundings. Oh may that star, that radiant radical of their desire, not of mine, my friends, nor yet of yours, for no two stars, as Saint Paul tells us, are on a par in the matter of glory, delight them without ceasing with legitimate inflexions!' (MPK 130-131).

Draffin's intention is clear, but his speech contains so many clichés and combinations of heterogeneous references that very little meaning struggles through. The result is burlesque, in which a relatively banal situation is ironically puffed up. Dislocation of language from the meaning it is intended to convey is illustrated largely for comic effect here, but in Beckett's later fiction the potential for words to become non-referential and unwieldy is a source of despair, as well as humour.

Just as the Poet in "A Wet Night" is a vehicle for wryly mocking self-parody; not only is an exaggerated version of a certain artistic outlook attributed to Draffin, but a previous Beckett text is said to be his. Draffin is not as distasteful as the Poet.

His affectations are those of aesthetic fastidiousness - "He expelled his words with gentle discrimination, as a pastry-cook squirts icing upon a cake" (MPK 109) - rather than pompous conceit. However, the description of his artistic technique brings into play a more stringently critical variety of self-parody than that which was involved in the re-location of "Calvary by Night". Draffin composes a joke, inspired by the wedding invitation. After some consideration he rejects it for verbal use: "The only thing he did not like about it was its slight recondity ... Well, he must just put it into his book" (MPK 111). Draffin's book is introduced as a repository for the superfluity of his life. This is pointed out explicitly later in the story: "Walter's book was a long time in coming out because he refused to regard it as anything more than a mere dump for whatever he could not get off his chest in the ordinary way" (MPK 120). The book is identified as "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" - which is also the title of Beckett's previous work. So Beckett trivialises his authorship of "Dream" by jokingly ascribing the work to the finicky - and alcoholic - Draffin. At the same time, he mocks the "dump" of a work itself and by giving us information (which may or may not be fictive) about the processes behind the composition of "Dream", Beckett implies a critical appraisal of his own artistic technique. The self-parody in "A Wet Night" and "What a Misfortune" is more than an in-joke for those readers who recognise the reference and are amused by the ridicule. It anticipates the complex relationship which later narrators have with their stories - relationships which are partly characterised by the mocking disparagement and rejection of recently created work. Equally importantly, it implies an interpretation of an earlier text in what is the first of a series of Beckett texts attached to previous works by ironic links of reference.

The instances of self-parody in *More Pricks than Kicks* playfully illustrate the excesses of literary poseurs, for whom art is a means to a social end, or a fashionable appurtenance, rather than a cause in itself. Because the affectations of these

characters are comically excessive, because Beckett uses them to mock certain methods of verbal obtuseness and because, at the same time, Beckett draws attention to his role as their ultimate creator by mocking, through these characters, his own, earlier literary style and technique, the self-parodies are part of a non-naturalistic tendency in *More Pricks than Kicks*. Ordinary parody is of course also part of this tendency. When, in "What a Misfortune", for instance, the narrator informs us of Lucy's death he does so by parodying the turgid formality of an obituary:

... she died ... after two years of great physical suffering borne with such fortitude as only women seem able to command, having passed from the cruellest extremes of hope and despair that ever sundered human heart to their merciful resolution, some months before her decease, in a tranquility of acquiescence that was the admiration of her friends ... (MPK 105).

The almost sonorous style of this description is such an exaggerated mimicry of the obituary form that Lucy's death becomes remote, and it is the narrative form itself which receives our attention. So the event is subordinate to the function of the words describing it and this function is to comically ridicule a particular writing style. We are a long way from the kind of literature which aims to involve us in the illusion of authentic people and plausible events. Through various kinds of parody, the narrator of *More Pricks than Kicks* displays his consciousness of the work itself as an artifact composed of groups of words arranged in particular ways. Parodies in *More Pricks than Kicks* do not occur in isolation, they are part of a milieu of self-consciousness which therefore requires analysis.

The narrator of *More Pricks than Kicks* draws attention to the fictive status of his text in a number of ways. Perhaps the simplest of these is the frequent reference to other literary works, which establishes *More Pricks than Kicks* as the product of a literary tradition. Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Defoe and Fielding are

among those whose work is quoted or referred to. The purpose of this is usually comic enrichment - such as when a clogged asthmatic within earshot of the hospitalised Belacqua "coughed, as Crusoe laboured to bring his gear ashore, the snugger to be" (MPK 147). A ludicrous contrast between Crusoe's earnest industry and the bringing up of phlegm lies within the essential appropriateness of the comparison: both Crusoe and the asthmatic want survival and comfort. References such as these, however, are more than comic decoration. In mentioning other fictions, the narrator is subtly reinforcing the reader's apprehension of the fictional nature of his own work.

The direct address to the reader is a significant self-conscious technique in *More Pricks than Kicks*. The narrator uses this to invite the reader's scrutiny of his function as narrator, to make the reader heed the contrived nature of the text, and, in some instances, to create the illusion of spontaneous composition. All of these factors are at work when the narrator remarks that "This may be premature. We have set it down too soon, perhaps. Still, let it bloody well stand" (MPK 59), or when he asks the reader "is all this merely ridiculous?" (MPK 97). A more complex - and Sternean - example occurs in "Love and Lethe", when the narrator interrupts his story to introduce Ruby in detail:

We know something of Belacqua, but Ruby Tough is a stranger to these pages. Anxious that those who read this incredible adventure shall not pooh-pooh it as unintelligible we avail ourselves now of this lull, what time Belacqua is on his way, Mrs. Tough broods in the kitchen and Ruby dreams over her gloria, to enlarge a little on the latter lady. (MPK 80)

In this, the narrator does more than create the characteristic effects of direct authorial address. He is ironically positing the existence of parallel worlds with time in common - the actual world in which we read, and the literary world in which Mrs Tough broods (and so forth).

It is as if, in scenes of high action, the reader must read faster. This raises teasing questions about the kind of illusion which fiction creates; in particular, the illusion of simultaneous action, reportage and reading. In this story the narrator patronisingly assumes concern for the reader's acceptance of his creation while, at the same time, justifying himself:

... we feel confident that even the most captious reader must acknowledge not merely the extreme wretchedness of Ruby's situation, but also the verisimilitude of what we hope to relate in the not too distant future. For we assume the irresponsibility of Belacqua, his faculty for acting with insufficient motivation, to have been so far evinced in previous misadventures to be no longer a matter for surprise (MPK 82).

With amusingly disarming frankness, the narrator points out his need to create likenesses and to convince the reader of the plausibility of his likenesses. So one of the assumptions (implicit in unself-conscious fiction) about our readership and his narratorhood is brought to the foreground. At the same time two of the factors which are capable of affecting the reader's conviction - description of the character's background (Ruby) and an accretion of expectations which the reader has of the character (Belacqua) - are suggested.

In "Ding-dong" the narrator uses a further technique to establish veracity: he tells us that Belacqua is a "sometime friend" (MPK 35) of his. He has been Belacqua's confidant, and is accurately reporting what he has been told. This gives *More Pricks than Kicks* something of the quality of the *roman-à-clef*, supported by the reporting of conversations between the narrator and Belacqua. Such characterisation has further significance. It is an early version of the exploration of the relationship between narrator and character which receives complex expression in works such as *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. When the narrator of *More Pricks than Kicks* punctuates his recollection of Belacqua's opinions with disclaimers

such as "He lived a Beethoven pause, he said, whatever he meant by that" (MPK 36) he is describing the first air of a climate of uncertainty which will engulf later narrators as they consider their characters and their craft.

Humour, parody (including the related forms of caricature, travesty and burlesque) irony and literary self-consciousness are the three variously interlocking elements of parodic structure in Beckett's early fiction. A final example from *More Pricks than Kicks* illustrates these three elements at work in the same parody. In "Draff" the narrator parodies his own role by assuming the voice of a conventional narrator, then ironically undermining its veracity:

Little remains to be told. On their return they found the house in flames, the home to which Belacqua had brought three brides a raging furnace. It transpired that during their absence something had snapped in the brain of the gardener, who had ravished the servant girl and then set the premises on fire. He had neither given himself up nor tried to escape, he had shut himself in the toolshed and awaited arrest. (MPK 172)

The irony is that quite a lot remains to be told and the humour arises from the discrepancy between the narrator's assessment of his tale ("little remains to be told") and the list of outrageous violations which follow. Ruby Cohn has pointed out that the narrative voice in *More Pricks than Kicks* can be parodic: "In describing the initial appearance of Thelma bbogs, Beckett parodies the omniscience of the Victorian author, making free use of hyperbole, litotes, jargon and involved syntax".²⁰ In this instance the parody is signalled by self-contradiction and litotes. The target is one of the traditional functions of omniscient narrators: accurate reportage. An expression conventionally used by such narrators is set down, then ridiculed in a way which implicitly raises questions

20. Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut*, p. 34.

about the narrator's judgement. This implicit questioning is the self-conscious content of the parody, the element which causes the reader to consider the playful mind constructing *More Pricks than Kicks*, and the possibility of fallible or capricious minds behind other fictions.

This discussion of parody in Beckett's early texts establishes the disintegrative function of his parodic mockery. "*Che Sciagura*" debunks pretentious styles of argument. The parodies of "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" all have a reductive purpose. Ostentatiously clichéd conversation between lovers and the contextual discrediting of Belacqua's sonnet debase both the popular and the formal, conventional literary expression of love. Caricatured voices ridicule artistic appreciation (the aesthete), the English society (the county gentleman) and the Irish (the gossip). Parody of the intrusive narrator intentionally disrupts the integrity of the text. In *More Pricks than Kicks* parody exposes social and literary affectation. This exposure combines with reductive comedy and literary self-consciousness which fractures the association between the text and the world which it pretends to represent. However at this stage in Beckett's fiction such disintegration is comical, rather than threatening.

CHAPTER III

MURPHY

Murphy has much in common with *More Pricks than Kicks*, especially in the related fields of humour and parody. However, as might be expected, the later work is more controlled and focussed. The similarities and differences between *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy* are equally instructive, since likenesses suggest areas of continuing importance for Beckett, while change indicates development from an original preoccupation. This chapter initially compares the use of relevant techniques and devices in the texts, then discusses those parodic elements in *Murphy* which do not have a specific grounding in *More Pricks than Kicks*, in order to identify the nature of this consolidation and development.

Beckett peoples *More Pricks than Kicks* with a variety of comic grotesques: freaks whom the narrator's spotlight plays on for a few pages, before obscurity passes over them and a fresh eccentric takes their place. But in *Murphy* one comically excessive and inexplicable character is presented, and sustained, in the person of Cooper, the "low-sized, clean-shaven, grey-faced, one-eyed man, triorchous and a non-smoker. He had a curious hunted walk, like that of a destitute diabetic in a strange city. He never sat down and never took off his hat" (*Mu* 34). Cooper, too bizarre for our sympathy or identification, stalks through the action, hatted and upright, performing his functions of servant, detective and double agent, as predictably as a machine. Toward the end of the book he is mysteriously released into a different kind of bondage: that of normal humanity. Sitting on a bar-stool for the first time in decades, his head uncovered, his voice trembles as he offers his neighbour a drink. The macabre hilarity of the scene which follows, in which we see Cooper, later the same evening, using Murphy's cremated remains (the disposal of which has been entrusted to him) as a missile in a bar-room brawl, does not detract from the poignant effect of this voice. Cooper cannot account for his transformation, he "did not know what had happened to set him free of those feelings

that for so many years had forbidden him to take a seat or uncover his head" (*Mu* 153). The reader, however, can guess. Cooper's liberation occurs after Murphy's death and the two events seem bound together, with unfathomable symmetry. Earlier in *Murphy* Wylie, another comically outrageous figure, defines humanity as "'a well with two buckets, ... one going down to be filled, the other coming up to be emptied'" (*Mu* 37). It is as if Wylie is right, and for reasons which are beyond even those most intimately affected, the declining bucket contains Murphy's existence and the ascending bucket contains Cooper's liberation. The grotesques of *Murphy* carry much more meaning than those of *More Pricks than Kicks*. The extension and development of the characterisation of comic grotesques, which Cooper exemplifies, is also part of a tendency toward deeper characterisation in *Murphy*. In *More Pricks than Kicks* Belacqua shares the spotlight with the narrator, comic characters make fleeting appearances, and each cluster of incidents seems discrete, slightly fragmented from those which follow. In *Murphy*, on the other hand, the plot and characters show increased continuity and depth.

As we have seen, in *More Pricks than Kicks* Beckett exploits the comic possibilities of the macabre. He continues to use this technique in *Murphy*. The most striking example is the identification and disposal of Murphy's remains, which lie in the incongruously cosy morgue of the mental hospital in which Murphy, disciple of the mental, has sought a less final kind of self-effacement than that which ultimately overtakes him. Murphy's self-proclaimed friends and Celia, his genuine mistress, arrive at the morgue to confirm his death. There is a certain undignified jostling for order of importance among the friends, a general and silent squabbling. The corpse is unveiled by Ticklepenny, a reluctant nurse and enthusiastic homosexual, and Bim, his boss and lover. The occasion is presided over by a doctor and coroner who are caricatures of pedantic and empirical medical attitudes. They speak in parodies of medical jargon: "an extensive capillary angioma of most unusual situation" (*Mu* 149) is the way in which Dr Killiecrankie describes the birthmark

by which Celia identifies the corpse. However this ignominy is just the beginning. Beckett extracts the maximum grim humour from the situation. Murphy's will states that:

With regard to the disposal of these my body, mind and soul, I desire that they be burnt and placed in a paper bag and brought to the Abbey Theatre, Lr Abbey Street, Dublin, and without pause into what the great and good Lord Chesterfield calls the necessary house, where their happiest hours have been spent, on the right as one goes down into the pit, and I desire that the chain be there pulled upon them, if possible during the performance of a piece, the whole to be executed without ceremony or show of grief. (*Mu* 151).

There is a double edge to this: as well as providing for a comically ignominious end for Murphy, comic derision is aimed at the Abbey Theatre with the hint that the happiest seat in the house is the toilet. However, as if this exit were not irreverent enough, Murphy's wishes are unfulfilled and his "body, mind and soul" ultimately mingle with "the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits (and) the vomit" (*Mu* 154) of the saloon floor above which Cooper has brawled, using all his resources in the fight, including the packet containing the ashes of Murphy. Incongruity and indignity are the source of humour in Murphy's post-mortem end. The conventional attitude to death, in life or art, is solemn and may involve eulogy, euphemism and veneration. Beckett scoffingly reduces Murphy - a strong and detailed character, with whom the reader will have established some kind of rapport - to the level of saloon floor rubbish. This inversion of conventional attitudes is very funny, but the underlying message - that highly individualised personalities are ultimately reducible to waste matter of the lowest kind - is blacker than anything to be found in *More Pricks than Kicks*.

Not all of the macabre humour in *Murphy* is as grim and explicit as that which is brought to bear on Murphy's final fate. Murphy's last and most ironic friendship is with an almost autistic schizophrenic, Mr. Endon, whose most likely suicide method is apnoea,

which is, as the text notes, "a physiological impossibility" (*Mu* 105). Voluntary cessation of breathing to the point of death may not be possible, but since it is an inevitable consequence of death, the result of this intentional muddle between cause and effect is a subtle kind of macabre jocularity.

Conversational play in *More Pricks than Kicks* is orchestrated somewhat heavily by the narrator, who delights more in convoluted descriptive passages. In *Murphy*, however, we find a great deal of snappy comical dialogue, some of which is parodically erudite (Wylie's remark about humanity and buckets occurs in this context); and some of which is immediately accessible. The following exchange between Murphy and Celia illustrates the latter variety:

'Are you never coming back?'
 'I have it,' she said.
 'Don't I know,' said Murphy.
 'I don't mean that,' she said, 'I mean what you told me -'
 'I know what you mean,' said Murphy.
 'Meet me at the usual at the usual,' she said. 'I'll have it with me.'
 'That is not possible,' said Murphy. 'I expect a friend.'
 'You have no friends,' said Celia.
 'Well,' said Murphy, 'not exactly a friend, a funny old chap I ran into.' (*Mu* 9)

Punning and contradictory, this dialogue is reminiscent of Wilde. However it has an element which is characteristic of Beckett: the pointed use of a literary convention. This conversation is the reader's first encounter with Celia and both the details of her identity and the nature of "'it'" are suppressed in a way which is guaranteed - and intended - to draw attention to the device of literary suspense.

More Pricks than Kicks and *Murphy* have in common this tendency to self-consciously illustrate vital features of the conventions and devices which they use, a tendency to embed overt or implicit comments on narrative tone and technique into the text itself. So,

in *More Pricks than Kicks*, Beckett uses a caricature of a parodist and his entourage to create a general impression of the kind of parody he is using. In *Murphy* the reader is also given insight into the nature of humour and burlesque from within a context which is rife with both the comic and the parodic.

A telling example occurs when Beckett reveals Murphy's capacity for a totally comic view of existence:

Not the least remarkable of Murphy's innumerable classifications of experience was that into jokes that had once been good jokes and jokes that had never been good jokes. What but an imperfect sense of humour could have made such a mess of chaos. In the beginning was the pun. And so on. (*Mu* 41).

These last lines parody the opening words of the Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". This suggests the primal function of language: the ordering of original chaos. In Murphy's system the Logos, the mystical ordering principle invoked by St John, becomes a pun: ambiguous and comical, illuminating nothing. Through this parody, Beckett's awareness of the essentially contradictory nature of humour is displayed, along with the idea (prominent in later texts by Beckett) that language does not order: it mystifies. Murphy's system also mocks ordering systems themselves. It is implied that there are "innumerable" ways of looking at things and all ways are equally invalid.

Later in the novel Murphy's sense of humour again serves both a comical and an instructive purpose, as Murphy tells Celia his joke about the barmaid shamming pain (champagne) because the stout porter bit her (bitter):

This was a joke that did not amuse Celia, at the best of times and places it could not have amused her. That did not matter. So far from being adapted to

her, it was not addressed to her. It amused Murphy, that was all that mattered. He always found it most funny, more than most funny, clonic, it and one other concerning a bottle of stout and a card party. These were the Gilmigrim jokes, so called from the Lilliputian wine. He staggered about on the floor in his bare feet, one time amateur theological student's shirt, dicky and lemon bow, overcome by the toxins of this simple little joke. He sank down on the dream of Descartes linoleum, choking and writhing like a chicken with the gapes, seeing the scene. On the one hand the barmaid, fresh from the country, a horse's head on a cow's body, her crape bodice more a W than a V, her legs more an X than an O, her eyes closed for the sweet pain, leaning out through the hatch of the bar parlour. On the other the stout porter, mounting the footrail, his canines gleaming behind a pad of frothy whisker. Then the nip, and Tintoretto's *Origin of the Milky Way*. (Mu 81)

This illustrates the catalysts of the belly-laugh: imaginative engagement, comic reduction and incongruity. There is also a suggestion that humour is in some way pathogenic ("toxins", "gapes") - which, for individuals as susceptible as Murphy, is clearly the case. Variation in individual reactions to the same joke are contrasted in such an exaggerated way that the contrast itself is comical. The gap between the simplicity of Murphy's pun and the extravagance of his response, and the bizarre components of his costume also give rise to humour. Passages such as this, then, inform about the technique which they are simultaneously using.

The qualities of burlesque also receive internal exegesis in *Murphy*. When Celia and Murphy part for the last time Celia, who suspects that Murphy is going "'For good and all'" (Mu 82), leans out of the window of their room and watches him pass below:

... she called down goodbye. He did not hear her, he was hissing.

His figure so excited the derision of a group of boys playing football in the road that they stopped their game. She watched him multiplied in their burlesque long after her own eyes could see him no more. (Mu 83)

Unlike Murphy's joke, the description of which illuminates the response to jokes in general, certain characteristics of burlesque are highlighted here, but the text itself is not, at this point, burlesquing anything. However, the broader context is in sympathy with this passage: burlesque is part of the overall comic milieu in *Murphy*. Burlesque has been defined very broadly as "a damaging takeoff on one's work or manner".¹ Beckett uses the term in this open sense, conveying an impression of the exaggerated contemptuous imitation and repetition which, in certain cases, constitutes burlesque. Furthermore, the way in which Celia loses sight of Murphy and is left gazing at derisive imitations of his bearing suggests the way in which burlesque copies the obvious, and also the way in which the after-image of a successful burlesque may be more durable than the original.

Humour is the usual effect of parody, burlesque is almost a kind of parody but Beckett's references to laughter and burlesque have results similar to those of his literary parody. Such references are an internal definition of techniques which are also used in the text and literary parody (by ridiculing those conventions which are alien to the text) has a similar definitive function.

An entertaining strand of mock-heroic parody runs through both *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy*. Nowhere in *Murphy* is there an example of the mock-heroic which equals the sustained triumph of Walter Draffin's speech. Rather, this technique is integrated into the text, so that isolated phrases evoke, and travesty, entire myths. For example Neary, a would-be trigamist, searches for Murphy in London. His motives are carnal - Neary hopes to persuade Murphy's deserted Irish girlfriend, Miss Counihan, to transfer her affections to him. However his search is hampered by the existence of a previous wife, "Ariadne née Cox", at large and alert in London - or so Neary

1. Maurice Charney, *Comedy High and Low*, p. 15.

thinks: "It was like looking for a needle in a haystack full of vipers. The town was alive with her touts, with her multitudinous self, and he was alone" (*Mu* 68). In fact we learn much later that Ariadne has committed suicide: "The Cox had swallowed 110 aspirins following the breaking off of a friendship with a Mr Sacha Few, an anti-vivisection worker" (*Mu* 153). Neary, furtive and anxious, makes a ridiculous Theseus. His heroic task (finding Murphy) is described in a metaphor for paranoia (the needle among the vipers) based, itself, upon a platitude. So the myth of Ariadne's desertion by Theseus is travestied through banality: the maiden name of Beckett's Ariadne does not quite rise to the mythological level, and far from possessing a "multitudinous self", she destroys the only self she has. A similar contrast between the mythological and the commonplace occurs when Murphy, explaining to Celia that he is unemployable, a "chronic emeritus", justifies his position by asking: "Was Ixion under any contract to keep his wheel in nice running order? Had any provision been made for Tantalus to eat salt?" (*Mu* 16). By invoking these figures, Murphy is trying to locate himself in the "mythological present" which is mentioned by Molloy. Mythical references contrast amusingly with the sordid realities of Murphy's world, and the result is mock-heroic.

Not all ironically high-style descriptions in *Murphy* draw on mythology. In Cooper's eyes, a publican is an illustrious being:

At the corner he paused to admire the pub, superior to any he had ever seen. Suddenly a man was standing in the porch, radiant in his shirt-sleeves and an apron of fine baize, holding fast a bottle of whisky. His face was as the face of an angel, he stretched out his hand upon Cooper. (*Mu* 70).

This is burlesque as it has been defined by J.L. Styan: "burlesque gains some of its peculiar force by being grand with the words, when the situation or character explicitly lacks grandeur".²

2. J.L. Styan, *The Dark Comedy*, London, Cambridge University Press (1962), p. 35.

A quality of inappropriately comic grandeur is frequent in both *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy*. Specific examples may be more accurately called mock-heroic or travesty, but the general technique is mockery of the lofty, the esteemed or the heroically idealistic, and the effect is comical.

Beckett seems to have little time for the excesses of the Irish Literary Revival and the poetry of the Celtic Twilight. In "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" he has the Alba parody the excesses of this movement.

Haven't we had enough Deirdreeing of Hobson's weirds
and Kawthleens in the gloaming hissing up petticoats
of sorrarrhoea? Haven't we had enough withered
pontiffs of ciarino-sccrissimo! 'The mist' she
sneered 'an' it rollin' home UP the glen and the mist
agin an' it rollin' home DOWN the glen! Up, down, haus
aroun ... Merde. Give me the moon. Give me Racine.³

Later mockeries of the same literary movement suggest that this is the view of Beckett himself (as opposed to an opinion which is merely used to characterise the Alba). In *More Pricks than Kicks* Beckett mocks literary identification with the peasantry through a caricature: the Poet. (The Poet's verse, however, is used to mock an entirely different target.) In *Murphy* Miss Carridge, Murphy and Celia's parsimonious and fetid landlady, retires to her room after having watched Celia, defeated by Murphy's desertion, slowly climb the stairs. Miss Carridge reads "*The Candle of Vision* by George Russell (A.E.)" (Mu 89). The contrast between Russell's mysticism and Miss Carridge's hard-nosed, inquisitive pragmatism points up the remoteness of this kind of literature from human necessity and ordinary suffering, represented, at this point, by Celia.

In *More Pricks than Kicks* Beckett caricatures literary figures in order to ridicule certain literary affectations. He continues

3. quoted by Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, p. 336.

to do so in *Murphy*. *More Pricks than Kicks* has the Poet and Walter Draffin; *Murphy* has Austin Ticklepenny, a poet and drunk through whom the Irish Revivalist style is mocked. At the time he enters Murphy's life, Ticklepenny has relinquished his verse for the sake of his health: "'My liver dried up,' said Ticklepenny, 'so I had to hang up my lyre'" (*Mu* 52). The days when Ticklepenny, fuelled by alcohol, could compose freely, are over. He has a disconcerting and pretentious habit of talking about himself in the third person, so the narrator conveys the mechanical quality of Ticklepenny's verse in Ticklepenny's own words:

'That same Ticklepenny,' said Ticklepenny, 'who for more years than he cares to remember turned out his steady pentameter per pint, day in, day out, is now degraded to the position of male nurse in a hospital for the better-class mentally deranged' (*Mu* 52).

This change of fortune has been brought about by a Dr. Fist, who describes Ticklepenny, with obvious truth and irony, as "a distinguished indigent drunken Irish bard" (*Mu* 53). Fist speaks in a delightfully comic parody of the German accent, which recalls similar idiomatic parodies in *More Pricks than Kicks*. He tells Ticklepenny to "'Giff de pooze ub or go keputt'", but this is simply establishing the ground for the remark he makes as he gives Ticklepenny a referral to his colleague at the hospital mentioned above: "'I giff yous a shit to Killiecrankie'" (*Mu* 53). It is Dr. Fist's opinion that Ticklepenny's alcoholic decline is "due less to the pints than to the pentameters" (*Mu* 53); the ends of which, as we are told much later in the novel, "he had laboured so long and lovingly to join" (*Mu* 98). So the task of writing is mechanical, laborious and ultimately destructive for Ticklepenny. The description of Ticklepenny's verse makes it clear that the association between Ticklepenny and poetry is mutually catastrophic:

... the class of pentameter that Ticklepenny felt it his duty to Erin to compose, (was) as free as a canary in the fifth foot (a cruel sacrifice, for Ticklepenny

hiccuped in end rimes) and at the caesura as hard and fast as his own divine flatus and otherwise bulging with as many minor beauties from the gaelic prosodoturphy as could be sucked out of a mug of Beamish's porter. (*Mu* 53) (The first parentheses are mine, the second Beckett's.)

So Ticklepenny writes poetry as if it were an uncontrollable physiological function, like hiccups or flatulence and the poetry which results is peristaltic, inflated ("divine flatus"), colloquial ("prosodoturphy") and sordid. Through this disparaging description of a nationalist poet who gets his gaelic from the grog and finds his true *métier* as a bottle-washer in a mental hospital, Beckett ridicules a significant Irish literary movement.

The treatment of Ticklepenny marks a refinement in Beckett's use of caricature. The caricatures of literary types in *More Pricks than Kicks* are not deeply bound into the action. Although Belacqua and the Alba leave the Frica's salon under the threat of a recitation by the Poet, this acts more as a stimulant than a cause. Without the Poet, "A Wet Night" would be less comical and entertaining, but it would be recognisable as a truncated version of the same story. The absence of Draffin, too, would not substantially alter "What a Misfortune". Murphy's meeting with Ticklepenny, on the other hand, is described as an "encounter, on which so much unhinges" (*Mu* 67). If this is taken to refer to Murphy, it accurately anticipates his accidental death, the direct cause of which is the accommodation Ticklepenny arranges for him at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. But it is also an ironic comment on the action of the novel itself, since the final integration and resolution of the plot pivot on this meeting between Ticklepenny and Murphy. So Ticklepenny represents a move from the significant, yet ornamental, to the equally important, but integral, use of caricature.

More Pricks than Kicks is rich in the devices and techniques which are parodic or related to parody: bizarre characters, grim humour, wry travesty, implicit or overt internal commentary on the devices or conventions it is itself exploiting, and comically inflated

language and caricatures of literary types. In *Murphy* Beckett extends his virtuosity in these areas. However, the differences between *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy* are almost as significant as the similarities. In particular, the use of parody in *Murphy* contrasts in certain major ways with its use in the preceding work. A comparison between the way in which the narrator of *More Pricks than Kicks* and the narrator of *Murphy* manipulate their texts illuminate points of similarity and contrast in the literary self-consciousness of each work, and also establishes the background for a consideration of the unique aspects of parody in *Murphy*.

In *More Pricks than Kicks* the reader is seldom allowed to forget that the text has been constructed by an alien imagination. At times this construction is deliberately exposed and the narrator appears like a stage-hand, clowning a little as he shuffles scenery about behind half-closed curtains: "Let us call in Winter", he says, "that dusk may fall now and a moon rise" (MPK 18). Within his domain - which is the text - the narrator of *More Pricks than Kicks* is all-powerful: at his word the light dims and the moon rises. The reader is unavoidably aware of the narrator's power. At the same time, since the moon - as the reader knows from his own experience - does not rise because a voice has decreed that it is winter, the reader is pre-eminently aware of the synthetic nature of the narrator's props. The props are stylised, they do not pretend to do other than represent, the narrator has called them into existence because he wishes to play with them, and, for him, there is no fun in unseen manipulation. But nobody confuses his tricks and toys with winter as they know it, with twilight or the moon. This is part of his intention. He is not constructing a simulacrum of reality.

The narrator in *More Pricks than Kicks* is overwhelmingly present: patronising and avuncular, he emphasises the gulf between himself and the reader: "He was merely betrothed", says the narrator,

of Belacqua, "but already he thought of his *fiancée* as his wife, an anticipation that young men undertaking this change of condition might be well advised to imitate" (MPK 94). This pompous advice parodies the didacticism of a writer such as Richardson, whose instructions on the subjects of conduct and morality are of prime significance in his texts. By advising young men to consider fiancées as wives, Beckett's narrator is comically inverting the morality which *Pamela* illustrates: the necessity of marriage before consummation. This is another example of a feature of *More Pricks than Kicks* which has already received attention: its non-naturalism, the tendency of the narrator to step in and point out his own contrivances, or, by parodying the narrative voice and sentiments of other texts, highlight the contrivances of those texts. Much of what is delightful, amusing and parodic in *More Pricks than Kicks* originates in the narrator's skill at playing with voices and props, with the tackle and scaffolding of the text itself.

The *Murphy* narrator also draws attention to himself and his role. He mentions other writers: Balzac, Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Wordsworth, George Russell, Malraux and Boswell. He quotes or obliquely refers to Dante, Rabelais, Swift, Spenser, Mary Shelley, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the Bloomsbury set (whom he calls a "canaille"). Two of his most powerful images draw their strength from descriptions of the sculptures of Puget and Bellini. The reader, conscious of this parade of historical artists through the text of *Murphy*, is in a similar situation to Celia, when she watches a bevy of artists promenading by the Thames:

... writers, underwriters, devils, ghosts, columnists, musicians, lyricists, organists, painters and decorators, sculptors and statuaries, critics and reviewers, major and minor, drunk and sober, laughing and crying, in schools and singly, passed up and down. A flotilla of barges, heaped high with waste paper of many colours, riding at anchor or aground on the mud, waved to her from across the water. (*Mu* 13)

The first sentence of this has the comical quality of seemingly endless enumeration, which will appear later, in *Watt*, as enumeration until all potential is exhausted. The second sentence, in describing barges laden with waste-paper, tethered or stuck in the mud, disparages the produce of the artists. It is unfortunate that Celia's reaction to this sight is not recorded. As in *More Pricks than Kicks* the effect of frequent references to other creators of fiction (and artists in general) is to lock the text in which these references appear (for instance *Murphy*) into the category of an artifact, a synthetic thing, related to artifacts which these other creators of fiction have produced. By implication, then, the *Murphy* narrator has his function as artificer highlighted.

At the beginning of Chapter Two in *Murphy* a list of trivia ironically purports to describe Celia. Her colouring, her dimensions and her measurements are set down in a way which, as Ruby Cohn points out, parodies the "statistics (which) might present a Hollywood star to readers of a movie magazine".⁴ Celia's age is arbitrarily dismissed as "unimportant" (perhaps, in line with Ruby Cohn's argument, in imitation of the reluctance on the part of some theatrical publicists to reveal the age of their clients). Her instep measurement, too, remains a secret, although the reason why her instep measurement should be withheld, when that of her wrist is given, is a mystery. However, this list is more than a comical parody of a commonplace style. In providing an intentionally inadequate list of certain of Celia's physical characteristics, the narrator shows us how descriptive detail can avoid coming to terms with the totality of an individual. At the same time, the exclusion of certain characteristics as "unimportant" comments on the subjective nature of the narrator's artistic selectivity. So through this ironically crude list (Celia's complexion is bluntly given as "White") the falsification of reality through selective stylisation in the kind

4. Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut*, p. 55.

of prose which concerns itself with appearances and proportions is pointed out.

Another method which the *Murphy* narrator uses to mock a certain way of using words (thereby emphasising words - or in this case, phrases - as the constituent parts of the text, and emphasising his own capacity as organiser of those parts) is when he ironically uses a cliché, then takes it at face value. For example, when describing Murphy and Celia's lodgings, he remarks that "The ceiling was lost in the shadows, yes, really lost in the shadows" (*Mu* 40). If this is true, Murphy's ceiling is unlike any the reader will have previously encountered in life or art! Misplaced literalism makes the description itself comically implausible, and therefore raises doubts about the narrator's veracity. Similarly, the weather is anthropomorphized, earlier in the novel, with "the gentle rain was trying not to fall" (*Mu* 39). A commonplace metaphorical adjective is suddenly - and comically - regarded literally. Beckett uses the technique of intentionally misplaced literalism with the same comic and self-conscious effect in later works: Molloy tells us, with heavy irony, that he "was out of sorts. They are deep, my sorts, a deep ditch, and I am not often out of them" (*Mo* 70).

Direct intrusion into the text, which is the most obvious way of drawing attention to the existence and function of the narrator, is less common, but no less funny, than in *More Pricks than Kicks*. For instance, after obliquely describing Celia and Murphy's nocturnal ecstasies as "music" the narrator intrudes with comic vehemence: "This phrase is chosen with care, lest the filthy censors should lack an occasion to commit their filthy synecdoche" (*Mu* 47). The irony here is that the synecdoche ("music") by which the entirety of *Murphy* could be condemned, is so euphemistic that its usage has ensured that censors will, indeed, lack an occasion for censure. Censors are not the only readers who find themselves mentioned by the narrator. At one point he politely requests a certain typeface

of the compositor, at another he recommends Murphy's method of drinking more tea than he has paid for with the comment "Try it sometime, gentle skimmer" (*Mu* 51). The substitution of "skimmer" for the conventional "reader" is mildly self-deprecatory, as though the narrator does not expect to have attracted deep and serious readership. Other intrusions reflect slightly different areas of the relationship between narrator and reader: when, with mock-earnest self-analysis, the narrator follows a description of Wylie kissing Miss Counihan with the remark that "the above passage is carefully calculated to deprave the cultivated reader" (*Mu* 69) he is parodying the judgement, upheld by censors, that such descriptions can have a prurient influence. At the same time, he is joking at the expense of the reader: those who are not "depraved", presumably, are those who are also not "cultivated".

The narrator also uses the more subtle method of making wry observations about the qualities of fiction through the mouths of his characters, or revealing those qualities through description of a character. He has Neary appeal to Wylie and Miss Counihan in these terms: "'Let our conversation now be without precedent in fact or literature, each one speaking to the best of his ability the truth to the best of his knowledge'" (*Mu* 120). This implies that literature consists of lies. Earlier in the novel the narrator parodies a temperance cliché by claiming that "Murphy (is) a strict non-reader" (*Mu* 93), suggesting that literature is intoxicating, perhaps best avoided.

Many of the examples used, throughout this discussion, to illustrate narrative self-consciousness are parodies. In *Murphy* there is a noticeable emphasis on parody as a method of highlighting the fictional status of the *Murphy* text itself, and the contrivances of other types of writing. An instance of this which has received a certain amount of critical attention occurs when Murphy returns to his lodgings - "to find, not a meal spoiling as he had hoped

and feared, but Celia spreadeagled on her face on the bed. A shocking thing had happened" (*Mu* 62). The explanation for Celia's state and the details of the "shocking thing" are held over for two more chapters. This cliff-hanger parodies the methods of thrillers or serials.⁵ By ironically creating suspense, the narrator suggests the gratuitous way in which suspense may be created, and sustained, in such works. The neatness with which the disparate strands of action and motivation in *Murphy* is resolved and the atmosphere of irony and self-consciousness has caused the work to be seen, in its entirety, as a parody of conventional literary methods. John Fletcher leans toward this view:

The plot of *Murphy* ... is occasionally quite improbable ... and can be read as a parody of the traditional novel (the finicky precision with which the simultaneities of the action are pointed out, as well as the virtuosity with which the different elements of the intrigue are harmonized and the characters made to converge, would seem to constitute a deliberate *défi de maître*)⁶

To wholeheartedly embrace this view one must accept a very high degree of overt control of the text by the narrator. The manipulations of the narrator, as the previous discussion has established, are intentionally obvious in *Murphy*, as is the narrator's awareness of literary tradition. Parody, as we have seen, plays a significant part in this consciousness of past (that is, traditional) and present (the *Murphy* text) literary practice. However, while acknowledging the strength of parodies aimed at literary traditions and the incidence of literary conventions, such as suspense, which are used parodically in *Murphy*, the danger of placing too much emphasis on this aspect of parody *alone* is that it may seem to eclipse in importance both the varied types of parody which are used in *Murphy* and the variety of significant, non-parodic methods of self-conscious play. Self-consciousness, parodic or otherwise,

5. Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut*, p. 47.

6. John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, London, Chatto and Windus (1964), p. 41.

needs to be seen as part of the effect of *Murphy*, rather than the entire narrative purpose. Otherwise the novel may appear glib and mechanical, which is the impression one gets from Raymond Federman's description of *Murphy* as "a calculated intellectual exercise that coldly mirrors the world of man while subtly revealing the fraudulence of fiction".⁷ *Murphy* is more than a reflective "exercise" in literary definition, it is vital and funny. While the narrator often uses literary conventions in a way which exposes their conventional nature, as opposed to using these building blocks of literature to create a naturalistic fictional edifice, and while parody often plays a part in this exposure, self-consciousness is only one of many narrative preoccupations in *Murphy*, and parodies of literary traditions are, as we shall see, only one of many fully developed strands of parody in *Murphy*.

From the outset, the narrator of *Murphy* places Murphy, his habits, his location, his dilemmas and his acquaintances at the centre of the textual stage, where they remain throughout the work. Although the narrator is at pains to contradict the illusion that his text is other than fictional, the depiction of his characters and their circumstances take precedence over the literary knowingness in his work. In this, *Murphy* differs from *More Pricks than Kicks*, in which the text seems saturated with the presence of the narrator, telling and showing us what it is like to be a narrator who is telling us about, and showing us, characters and circumstances. This shift in narrative emphasis has significant consequences for the use of parody in the later text. In *Murphy* existence and fate are as significant as the description of existence and fate. Accordingly, there is a concern with existential problems, such as the tension between pattern and chaos, between the abstract and the organic. This concern is expressed in parodies of the classical

7. Raymond Federman, *Journey into Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*, p. 67.

ways with which man has attempted to explain, or come to terms with, aspects of existence and fate: philosophy, mathematical and geometric systems, astronomy and theology. The fact that these fields of speculation, belief and inquiry are lampooned and travestied - so that philosophy appears as an eclectic combination of fragments from many thinkers and schools; the mathematical and geometric (representatives of abstract precision) are used to confer a comically automative quality on the characters; superstition, the underside of theology, is expressed in mock-omens; and astronomy appears as astrology - does not detract from the significance of these problems.

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* David Hume writes of the "melancholy and delirium" which results from trying to make sense of ourselves and the world. Then he offers a remedy for this philosophical despair:

The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me and heated my brain that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I or what? From what causes do I derive my existence and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded by all these questions and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed with the deepest darkness and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty.

Most fortunately, it happens that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, Nature herself suffices to that purpose and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind or by some avocation and lively impression of my senses which obliterate all

these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse and am merry with my friends; and when, after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further.⁸

When Hume writes of the dismay, perplexity and loss of intellectual discrimination to which deep contemplation of the difficulty of logical thought reduces him, his words anticipate the situation of many of Beckett's characters and narrators from *Murphy* onward. Belacqua is not innocent of philosophical speculation -- the narrator of *More Pricks than Kicks* tells us that "he had allowed himself to get run down, but he scoffed at the idea of a sequitur from his body to his mind" (MPK 28). This raises a question which has occupied generations of philosophers, a question which also pervades *Murphy*: how do thoughts which, unlike flesh, have no concrete properties (such as size, density, weight or temperature) influence flesh? Belacqua sneers at the separate halves of this issue, but it is a fleeting sneer. For *Murphy* and many of the characters and narrators who follow him, this and other philosophical enigmas profoundly affect their thoughts and the ways in which they act and interact with the world. Such intense speculation on the illogical leads, as Hume suggests, to perplexity and despair. Hume's emotional salvation, as he tells it, lies in a retreat from philosophical issues. This retreat is imposed by an irrational, natural component of his psyche. Beckett's principal characters and narrators from *Murphy* onward lack this corrective. When *Murphy* seems to retire from interaction with and speculation about the "big blooming buzzing confusion" (Mu 21), he is, with unwitting irony, relaxing in a way which parodies the method one philosopher, Schopenhauer, recommended for achieving peace of mind. (The parody, as we shall see, is derisive: mocking Schopenhauer's method by applying it in an exaggeratedly literal way, and pointing up the remoteness of

8. David Hume, in Robert Paul Wolff (ed.), *The Essential David Hume*, New York, New American Library (1969), p. 143.

Schopenhauer's ideal of a disinterested state from that of Murphy). It is as if Hume found question marks on his backgammon pieces, or discovered that his friends were arguing, over dinner, about the very issues which had driven him to seek their company. For Murphy, the double dose of philosophical experiment (his own inquiry, and his parodic retreat from the subject of that inquiry) is not, ultimately, homoeopathic. In Beckett's hands the chimera to which Hume compares philosophical speculation is durable, it becomes a parodic pastiche, an intentionally incongruous cobbling together of the lions, goats and serpents which are the philosophers of the past.

Chapter Six, in which Murphy's mind is discussed, occupies an appropriately central position in the text. This is the chapter in which the core of Murphy's existential state is defined, in which motivations for his eccentricities are advanced and expanded upon. The importance of this definition is signalled when, in the first paragraph of chapter six, Murphy's mind is described as the "gravamen" of the textual "informations" (*Mu* 63). Given that the pages which follow are parodically philosophical and theological, it is significant, too, that Beckett uses a word ("gravamen") which has ecclesiastical connotations (those of theological grievance or accusation).

From the outset the narrator disclaims any pretensions to authenticity which his description might seem to carry. We are offered, not a representation of Murphy's mind in the form of a description of what it is, but a subjective perspective on that mind, a description of "what it felt and pictured itself to be" (*Mu* 63). This allows the narrator some latitude for play - oddities may be attributed to Murphy's quirks, rather than those of the narrator. If we expected a coherent theory of cognition within a consistent philosophical framework from a narrator who seems, at this point, to be reasonably authoritative, we certainly do ~~not~~ expect this from Murphy. The narrator's disclaimer allows him to

further his characterisation of Murphy by describing the central element of Murphy's self-awareness at the same time as it frees him to construct a mock philosophy from his own playful ideas and a playful use of scraps of the speculations made by an eclectic range of philosophers.

Reflected in the mirror of the narrator's description, we have Murphy's mind as it sees itself:

Murphy's mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without. This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain. Nothing ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it. (*Mu* 63)

Murphy's self-awareness does not suggest, as might first appear, an epistemological version of the idea that radios contain miniature orchestras. For Murphy's mind, as it is described here, does not provide scaled-down representations of elements of reality which are external to it. It is not duplicative. Rather, it sees itself in a way which can only be expressed through paradox: the mind is contained within a reality which it, at the same time, encompasses ("hermetically closed ... it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain").

Murphy's mind confers on itself the spherical perfection of a world entire to itself, a world which exists in perpetual now-ness. This is more than the kind of egoism which Martin Esslin, in a discussion of self-perception in Beckett's fiction, attributes to the condition of consciousness contemplating itself: "consciousness cannot conceive of itself as non-existing and is therefore only conceivable as unlimited, without end".⁹ The way in which Murphy's

9. Martin Esslin (ed.), Introduction, *Samuel Beckett: a Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 7.

mind sees itself containing all the past and the future within a continual present is a travesty of Berkeley's idea of the nature of the mind of God. According to Berkeley "all things past and to come are actually present to the mind of God"¹⁰ which exists outside of time. This parodic reference to Berkeley's notion of time and God points to a further play on Berkeley's ideas about the relationship between the world of objects and the mind of God. Berkeley considered that objects exist only insofar as they are observed. Objects continue to exist when we turn our backs on them because everything is continually observed by God.¹¹ Given this apotheosis of observation, and given that one quality of Murphy's mind imitates a quality of the mind of God as put forward by Berkeley, the *Murphy* narrator's insistence that his description of Murphy's mind originates in Murphy's self-observation acquires considerable significance. Berkeley did not regard the mind of God as an object among the world of objects, requiring, as they do (in Berkeley's terms) perpetual observation to keep them in existence. However, by providing Murphy's mind with a correspondence to the mind of God (as Berkeley sees it) and by emphasising the self-perception of Murphy's mind Beckett implicitly raises questions about divine self-observation. If God's perception is the existential fixative, must not the mind of God be continually engaged in self-observation in order to preserve both itself and the material world from annihilation? This irreverently presupposes that God's mind is of the same status as the objects which it keeps in place and such a supposition is clearly not Berkeley's intention. However, Berkeley's notion of divine perception, deprived of its piety, turned in on itself and pushed to a logical conclusion, suggests a complex game of perception and counter-perception, a game of necessary vigilance against the vagaries of the self and the material world.

10. George Berkeley, correspondence, in David M. Armstrong (ed.), *Berkeley's Philosophical Writings*, London, Collier Macmillan Publishers (1965), p. 247.

11. For an amusing summary and analysis of these notions, see Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, London, Unwin Paperbacks (1946), p. 623.

There is none of this in *Murphy*, but this is exactly the dilemma confronted by later narrators in Beckett's fiction when, like the Unnamable, they seek confirmation of their own existence in self-perception and scrutiny of all that may or may not be external to themselves. The way in which the *Murphy* narrator disclaims responsibility for his description of Murphy's mind, and the way in which he playfully travesties Berkeley's idea of time and the mind of God initiates speculation which leads, ultimately, to the situation of narrators like the Unnamable.

After dwelling on the harmonious darkness and luminosity of Murphy's mind, the narrator turns his attention to the relationship - or rather, the apparent lack of a relationship - between Murphy's mind and body:

... Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected ... (*Mu* 64).

This perhaps irreconcilable division between mind and matter is commonly interpreted as a fictionalised re-statement of a position which Descartes adopted and the Occasionalist philosophers adapted. Richard N. Coe elucidates these references:

Descartes had posited a rigid dualism: a mind which was purely spiritual, a body which was purely material and indeed mechanical. ... But there was a snag. Descartes, in spite of his appeal to the "pineal gland" and its "animal spirits", was no more able than is Murphy, his spiritual descendent, to explain the action of mind upon matter. ... It was left to the Cartesians of the second generation - Malebranche, Geulincx, Geraud de Cordemay - to propose alternative solutions; and these solutions ... are those which Beckett adopts.¹²

12. Richard N. Coe, *Samuel Beckett*, pp. 28-29.

Coe goes on to summarise the ways in which Malebranche and Geulincx explain the mystery of interaction between body and mind. According to Malebranche, God is the intermediary. The source of Murphy's conviction that "partial congruence of the world of his mind with the world of his body" can be attributed to a "process of supernatural determinism" (*Mu* 64) is, then, revealed. Geulincx held that mind and body are separate entities which operate simultaneously, like two perfectly synchronised clocks. This image is parodied in the very first page of *Murphy*, when "a cuckoo clock, having struck between twenty and thirty, became the echo of a street-cry, which now entering the mew gave *Quid pro quo! Quid pro quo!* directly" (*Mu* 5). At the time, Murphy is trussed to his rocking-chair in a meditative state, with the external world "shrinking and fading" before him. Taken as a reference to Geulincx, the clock is a reminder that the physical and mental necessarily co-exist (as the street-cry *Quid pro quo!* implies), despite Murphy's ritual restraint of his body. The way in which Geulincx's image of precise clocks becomes, in *Murphy*, a single cuckoo clock, is typical of Beckett's parodic method of reduction and ridicule. For Murphy, the incompatibility between consciousness and the flesh is indeed real and immediate. It is, however, the consequences (for Murphy) of this incongruity, the "manner in which it might be exploited" (*Mu* 64) which the narrator is most anxious to describe.

How can a strong awareness of the division between mind and matter function to Murphy's advantage? The narrator begins to answer this by emphasising the antipathy between Murphy's mind and body. Between such polar opposites a choice is possible and Murphy opts for mental delights. But before these delights are detailed the mutually inhibiting nature of the division is established:

Murphy could think and know after a fashion with his body up (so to speak) and about, with a kind of mental *tic douloureux* sufficient for his parody of rational behaviour. But that was not what he understood by consciousness. (*Mu* 65)

So Murphy's body, when active, limits his mental processes to the point where they resemble a form of neuralgic twitch ("*tic douloureux*") - which, appropriately enough, originates in the malfunction of a cranial nerve. When Murphy's "rational behaviour" is said to be parodic, the term suggests inauthenticity. Whether Murphy is attempting to be rational in the commonplace usage of the word - that is, moderate and reasonable - or whether he attempts philosophical rationalism, all he achieves, in the narrator's opinion, is parody: a distorted imitation of rationality. This is a further example of Beckett's capacity to define the techniques with which he is working. He uses "parody" here in a general and derogatory sense, and this clarifies an attitude to the term "parody" which might also be deduced from his own parodies. At the same time as Murphy is characterised by an unwitting use of parody, the existence and tone of the intentional parody in the text is confirmed and defined, from within the text. However, this is peripheral to the narrator's concern, which is to describe the incompatibility of Murphy's mind and body, by way of an introduction to Murphy's consciousness.

Murphy's preoccupation with his consciousness has been attributed to the influence of Geulincx's doctrine that man, in his dealings with the world which is external to his mind, is wholly governed by God. Only in the intellect is man free from divine will and intervention:

Beckett's favourite occasionalist, the Belgian Calvinist Arnold Geulincx, emphasised the power of the mind within its own mind-limited realm, the only realm in which God gave man freedom. In Geulincx's *Ethics* ... (he) praised the meditative spirit who seeks, not direct action in the macrocosm, but contemplative bliss in the microcosm ... (Murphy) is a would-be Geulincxian¹³

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13. Ruby Cohn, "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett", in Martin Esslin (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: a Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 170.

Murphy's mind has three "zones" with correspondingly different qualities, functions and degrees of illumination. The zone of optimum clarity has the closest relationship with the world external to Murphy. This is the zone of memory and imagination, light and clear, where Murphy exacts revenge through imaginative projections of his external oppressors. Here, Murphy can "kick the Ticklepennies and Miss Carriages simultaneously together into ghastly acts of love" (*Mu* 66). The second zone is dim; here the power and control which Murphy exercised in the first zone gives way to "contemplation" of "forms without parallel" - that is, forms which do not correspond to external paradigms. In the third zone Murphy achieves absolute liberation from the temporal. This zone is obscure, chaotic and fragmented; in it "the world of the body (is) broken up into the pieces of a toy" (*Mu* 65). Nothing is differentiated from other things, no value can be assigned to anything. This is the zone of "forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principles of change" (*Mu* 66). Murphy finds this zone indescribably blissful. Murphy's progression into darkness and chaos is a parodic inversion of the Judeo-Christian version of Creation. In the second verse of Genesis I, the pre-created earth is described as "without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep". This is like Murphy's third zone. Murphy's dim, contemplative second zone recalls the description, in Genesis I, of God watching in the light of the first days as things come into being at his command (although of course Murphy is not controlling or necessarily approving the forms in his zone). Murphy's concentration, in his first zone, on exacting vengeance by manipulating his imaginative creations suggests the implacable God of the Old Testament, avenging himself without mercy on those among His people who have flouted His will. In Geulincx's terms, God has direct authority over all *minutiae* outside men's minds. Considered in the light of this, Murphy's countdown backwards through the stages of creation implies that man is God in his own mind. However the implications are broader than this. Murphy's

preference for primal chaos indicates a vehement rejection of significance and order, whether divinely imposed or conferred by mankind. So the ordering faculty of Murphy's mind, the source of all his "innumerable classifications" (*Mu* 41) is rejected in favour of a deeper stratum of consciousness, a kind of anti-mind, if the mental is equated with systematic organisation and reason. No wonder Murphy's "rational behaviour" is parodic! If Murphy is a God in his own mind, as all the theological and philosophical travesty and parody in Chapter Six suggests, he is a regressive God.

Later in *Murphy* it is suggested that God can intervene in psychological states, which seems to contradict the notion that man is free and supreme in his own mind. However, such a notion of divine intervention is simultaneously undercut. The suggestion comes about through Murphy's association of gas with chaos - which is ironically appropriate, given that gas, the agent of his death, will ultimately deprive him of the option of ordered thought and behaviour:

... for him henceforward gas would be chaos, and chaos gas. It could make you yawn, warm, laugh, cry, cease to suffer, live a little longer, die a little sooner. What could it not do? Gas. Could it turn a neurotic into a psychotic? No. Only God could do that. Let there be heaven in the midst of the waters, let it divide the waters from the waters. The Chaos and Waters Facilities Act. The Chaos, Light and Coke Co. Hell. Heaven. Helen. Celia. (*Mu* 100).

Only God can change neurosis into psychosis. This, however, has less to do with God influencing the minds of men than it has to do with God as creator of order and controller of ordering systems. All that is really suggested is that God can exchange the labels in a system of psychiatric classification - a system which Murphy rejects, elsewhere in the text. The sentences which follow identify God strongly with order. Murphy misquotes the description of the voice of God in Genesis, the voice which begins material creation by ordering the division of substance from itself. Murphy links

divine order with the social order by playing with legal and commercial titles for this order: "The Chaos and Waters Facilities Act ... The Chaos, Light and Coke Co." With comical irreverence, the idea of heaven leads Murphy inevitably to the idea of Celia.

In the first chapter of *Murphy* the reader, confronted with Murphy's eccentricity, is referred ahead to the sixth chapter where the motivation and rationale for this eccentricity is provided. In this later chapter, as we have seen, the tension between Murphy's mind and body, his preference for the experiences provided by his mind, and his prejudice against order are described through a parodic pastiche of philosophical and theological tenets. Looking back from the exegesis of Murphy's ontological situation to the eccentricities which that situation inspires, we find more parodic philosophy within Murphy's comically bizarre affectations. The following discussion will tease out certain of the philosophically parodic strands which anticipate, and go beyond, the parodies in Chapter Six.

Murphy opens with observations which lead into the striking description of the mechanism through which Murphy achieves access to the world of his mind:

He sat naked in his rocking-chair ... Seven scarves held him in position. Two fastened his shins to the rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breast and belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind. Only the most local movements were possible. Sweat poured off him, tightened the thongs. The breath was not perceptible. (*Mu* 5)

Murphy must have the skills of a contortionist to secure himself in this device, which enables him to rock, in repetitive arcs, out of the realm of the material and into the delightful inertia of the mental state, "as described in section six" (*Mu* 6) where he exists without effort, time, logic or reason. However the narrator's careful preliminary qualification of Murphy's expertise as an

escapist from the material world - "Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free" (*Mu* 5) - initiates doubts about the authenticity of Murphy's mental freedom. In fact, his mental state can be seen as, at best, partial and subjective, and at worst, delusive. By tying himself up, Murphy suppresses his physical functions and subdues his body, preventing it from inhibiting his mental release. He also prevents his mind from inciting his body to activity. So by constraining his body, Murphy seems to solve the problem of Cartesian dualism, that is, the problem of interaction between abstract thought and material body. But it is such a crude and mechanical solution that the problem is simply exacerbated through emphasis. Moreover, the state is vulnerable: when Murphy's mutinous body has a heart attack his chair is overturned and he lies helplessly, "fully prostrate in the crucified position" (*Mu* 20) awaiting discovery and rescue. Brought back to material reality by his own body, Murphy, God in his own pre-creative psychic state, is identified with the crucified Christ: the divine sacrificial victim. So the consequences of the division which Murphy apprehends between his mind and his body is a mental retreat, facilitated by a bizarre contraption which the vulnerable body (Murphy's heart is unpredictable) can overturn. But the situation is more complex even than this. Murphy's fidelity to the world of his mind is incomplete, the world at large has its appeal and the microcosm is not enough:

... it was not enough to want nothing where he was worth nothing, nor even to take the further step of renouncing all that lay outside the intellectual love in which alone he could love himself, because there alone he was lovable. These dispositions and others ancilliary, pressing every available means (e.g. the rocking-chair) into their service, could sway the issue in the desired direction, but not clinch it. It continued to divide him, as witness his deplorable susceptibility to Celia, ginger, and so on. (*Mu* 102).

Murphy's equivocal desires, then, result in internal conflict and tension. The nature of this conflict and the way in which Murphy

reacts to it corresponds, in many respects, to the ideas expressed by Schopenhauer.

Beckett is quite familiar with the philosophy of Schopenhauer, which influenced, and is quoted in, *Proust*. Schopenhauer considered desire to be the greatest evil, and fulfilment of desire the greatest delusion known to humanity. Satiation of desire is never more than temporary, a lifetime spent in want and fulfilment - which clears the ground for more want - is a lifetime spent in futile pursuit of the unattainable. Those sentiments, as we shall see, receive eloquently comic expression in *Watt*. In *Murphy* they are given fictional projection in the description of Neary, "doomed to hope unending ... as he scratches himself out of one itch into the next, until he shed his mortal mange ... " (*Mu* 113). There are, however, two layers of philosophical reference in this: Neary is an example of the folly of desire, in Schopenhauer's terms, but his canine attributes (fleas, mange) are an ironic reference to Diogenes, who chose to live like a dog and renounce desire for material things.¹⁴ In this last reference, however, it is the futility of Neary's urge to repeatedly assuage desire (scratching an itch, in Beckett's terms), rather than the simplicity of a canine way of life, which Beckett is suggesting. Schopenhauer's solution to the problem of desire lies in renunciation and detachment, which leads to "unshakable peace ... and the highest joy and delight in earth".¹⁵ The catalyst which brings about this renunciation is the suffering which results from thwarted desire, or the "inward disposition" of which Schopenhauer approves. The absence of desire (at least, as far as the material world is concerned) and introspection are the indications of Murphy's meditative state. However the parallels between Murphy's condition and that which Schopenhauer describes are more specific than this.¹⁶

14. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 241.

15. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, Trans. by E.F.J. Payne, New York, Dover Publications Inc. (1958), p. 398.

16. See James Acheson, "Beckett, Proust, and Schopenhauer", *Contemporary Literature*, 19 (Spring 1978), 165-79.

When Murphy defends himself against Celia's insistence that he work he likens himself to mythological figures who stand for punitive and continual suffering: "'Was Ixion under any contract to keep his wheel in nice running order? Had any provision been made for Tantalus to eat salt?'" (*Mu* 16). Schopenhauer illustrates his ideas with precisely the same mythological figures:

... the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus ... that moment we are delivered from the miserable pressure of the will we celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing; the wheel of Ixion stands still.¹⁷

So in conversation with the primary object of his desire, Celia, Murphy uses terms which correspond to those which Schopenhauer uses to describe desire and the renunciation of desire. Yet Murphy's remarks, as we have seen, derive humour from the shortfall between the banal necessity of earning a living and the high seriousness of archetypes for a life of repetitive suffering. Murphy brings a comic and reductive literal-mindedness to these myths, which, considered against the passage from Schopenhauer which (given this and other similarities) seems to have inspired Murphy's remarks, results in a parody of Schopenhauer's own high and serious use of myth. Since Murphy is essentially in agreement with Schopenhauer on the subject of repetitive desire, the parody is aimed at Schopenhauer's pretentiously allusive style, rather than the content of his philosophy.

Murphy's third zone of consciousness, achieved when his body is quiescent, corresponds in part to the desireless state as Schopenhauer describes it. So Murphy is, in a sense, Schopenhauer's fortunate man:

17. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

... how blessed must be the life of a man whose will is ... completely extinguished, except for the last glimmering spark that maintains the body and is extinguished with it. Such a man who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature, has at last completely conquered, is then left only as pure knowing being, as the undimmed mirror of the world. Nothing can distress or alarm him any more; nothing can any longer move him; for he has cut all the thousand threads of willing which hold us bound to the world, and which as craving, fear, envy and anger drag us here and there in constant pain. He now looks back calmly and with a smile on the phantasmagoria of this world which was once able to move and agonise even in his mind, but now stands before him as indifferently as chess-men at the end of a game ...¹⁸

Murphy, too, has known "The freedom of indifference, the indifference of freedom, the will dust in the dust of its object, the act a handful of sand let fall" (*Mu* 61), the remote zone of awareness beyond all emotion except a pleasure which is not quite pleasure. Murphy achieves this along the lines recommended by Schopenhauer: suppression of the physical, detachment from the material. Even the action of Murphy's rocking-chair recalls the ideas of Schopenhauer, who wrote that birth and death balance one another in "constant alternation", in a "vibration".¹⁹ This is perhaps the model for Murphy's oscillating rocking-chair. If so, Murphy's machine is a Schopenhauerian vehicle, traversing the narrow area between the poles of birth and death in arcs which are a concrete expression of Schopenhauer's view of the circle as "the genuine symbol of nature".²⁰ However Murphy's circles are repetitive and incomplete and the state to which they transport him, however positive, is temporary: Murphy cannot live wholly in the third zone and does not want to, as his internal conflict attests. His bitter struggles with his physical self culminate in bondage and a rebellion which overturns the Schopenhauerian vehicle; and in his meditative state appropriately will-less, and of neutral values, he is something less than "pure knowing being", "the undimmed mirror of the world".

18. *Ibid.*, Vol I, p. 391.

19. *Ibid.*, Vol II, p. 482.

20. *Ibid.*, Vol II, p. 777.

Schopenhauer, then, wrote that the world appears to the man who has liberated himself from it, "as indifferently as chess-men at the end of a game". When Murphy surrenders his chess-men to those of Mr. Endon, the impassive "schizophrenic of the most amiable variety" (*Mu* 105) encountered by Murphy when he takes over Ticklepenny's job, he enters the condition of "positive peace" (*Mu* 138) which corresponds to the state of indifference, of positive suspension of will, described by Schopenhauer. In this state time continues, but Murphy's inspection duties of the mental wards, described, in a way which echoes Schopenhauer's views of the circularity of nature and existence, as "the wheel of rounds and pauses", cease. There is more than one philosophical strand in this, Murphy's experience of "Nothing" is also associated with "the guffaw of the Abderite" - the expostulation of Democritus the Abderite, the Greek philosopher who held that atoms populate apparent nothingness.²¹ Plenitude and humour, then, are, by association, part of Murphy's nothingness. His experience of active nothingness seems to be precipitated, in fine Schopenhauer fashion, by his relinquishment of the formal, conventional pattern of chess movements: the stylised game which is a paradigm for the patterns and tactics of the world at large. But Mr Endon also has a part in Murphy's liberation. Given the presence, in *Murphy*, of Berkeley's ideas of existence through perception, the opacity of Mr. Endon's perception (which throws back at Murphy the "stigmatized" reflection of himself) suggests that Murphy, "unseen" (*Mu* 140) by the man into whose eyes he has gazed, is existentially as diminished as his reflection. If so, this is another factor in freeing Murphy from the material world. Murphy's freedom, however, is limited, the state "vanished, or perhaps simply came asunder" (*Mu* 138) leaving him in the cacophany of the mental ward. The transformed - but recognisable - philosophical echoes in this particular description of existential escape, parody the idea of a retreat from the physical self and the material world by describing such a retreat as spasmodic: within the experience, but ultimately beyond the control, of the one who would withdraw.

21. See "Murphy Metaphysics" *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 5 (Autumn 1979), 9-23.

All of this parodically allusive play has its genesis in the focal philosophical issue of *Murphy*: the ways in which a man might come to terms with a conflict between the abstract world of his mind and the material world of his body. So far this discussion has been orientated towards the world of Murphy's mind. However, in *Murphy* the world of the body is also described in terms which are parodically philosophical, entertaining and informative.

For Descartes, the human body is a machine: he was concerned with the involuntary movement which functions in reflex reactions; all other actions he attributed to the influence of mind and spirit. Descartes was deeply interested in mathematics and geometry. In *Murphy* his doctrine of automative physicality is parodied when the movements of characters are given a wooden, clockwork quality which at times seems to be as involuntary as a reflex reaction: "Mr Kelly fell back in the bed, which closed his eyes, as though he were a doll" (*Mu* 11). Neary jokes about Murphy's laziness in a way which emphasises the mechanical characteristics of the body: "'The last time I saw him' said Neary, 'he was saving up for a Drinker artificial respiration machine to get into when he was fed up breathing'" (*Mu* 32). So the body is a piece of apparatus, the functions of which may be undertaken by synthetic apparatus. Geometry and mathematics are brought into descriptions of physiques, which strengthens the Cartesian reference and adds to the automative quality of bodies in *Murphy*. Wylie, having spied on Miss Counihan unclothed, exclaims "'What a bust! ... All centre and no circumference'" (*Mu* 39). Ticklepenny straightens up by "squaring the circle of his shoulders" (*Mu* 55).

In *Murphy* attraction and love are given mechanical, mathematical or geometric connotations, to emphasise the connection with automative corporeality. When Murphy and Celia meet for the first time, they are described in terms which are a comically, exaggeratedly literal application of Cartesian ideas about mechanical physicality:

he ... gazed at Celia. For perhaps two minutes she suffered this gladly, then with outstretched arms began slowly to rotate ... like the Roussel dummy in Regent street. When she came full circle she found, as she had fully expected, the eyes of Murphy still open and upon her. But almost at once they closed, as for a supreme exertion, the jaws clenched, the chin jutted, the knees sagged, the hypogastrium came forward, the mouth opened, the head tilted slowly back ... (*Mu* 12).

The mechanical precision of movement in this is related to a certain mathematical predictability which matters of the flesh have in *Murphy*. So when Celia recounts her conversation with Murphy, her audience, Mr. Kelly, is able to anticipate Murphy's words because he is familiar with the formula: "'Did it go something like this?' said Mr Kelly. 'I pay you the highest tribute that a man can pay a woman, and you throw a scene.' ... 'Its not a bad guess,' said Celia. 'Guess my rump,' said Mr. Kelly. 'It is the formula'" (*Mu* 15-16). Cooper's amorous experiences, "with Miss A before he met Miss B, and again with Miss B before she met Miss A" (*Mu* 116) are also described in formulaic terms. The way in which mechanical physicality extends from Cartesian tenets to clockwork movement to the algebra of attraction exemplifies the way in which Beckett's philosophical parodies, tethered to origins which hold them like Mr Kelly holds his kite-string in *Murphy*, may move through atmospheres quite alien to that occupied by their point of origin.

In this discussion only the most significant areas of philosophical reference have been considered. *Murphy*, however, is saturated with such references, some of which are extremely direct, such as Wylie's comment about Neary: "'Hegel arrested his development'" (*Mu* 124); some of which are echoes, such as the description of a padded cell as "windowless, like a monad" (*Mu* 103) which, recalling Leibniz's doctrine of the monad as the metaphysical and essential self, comically identifies madness with this self; or such as the description in which Murphy, looking inwards, is said to have "beheld the beautific idols of his cave" (*Mu* 101), recalling Plato's image of the cave - in which he likens those without

philosophy to prisoners, conferring substance on the shadows which are all that they are permitted to see. Philosophical references in *Murphy*, slight or sustained though they may be, have a certain inevitable parodic cast. The playful, irreverent and comic context of *Murphy* would work against straightforward importation of philosophical notions, but in any case, the philosophy we are offered in *Murphy* is skilfully distorted, to comically enrich its new location and to provide a new perspective on its source. Certain doctrines of Descartes and Schopenhauer, among others, will be eternally questionable for *Murphy* readers, after the humour aroused by their distorted fictional exposition.

The *Murphy* world is deterministic, as statements such as "things hobble together for the only possible" (*Mu* 127) or "all things limp together for the only possible" (*Mu* 131) suggest. Such statements parody Voltaire's maxim that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds".²² Voltaire's optimism is corrupted, distorted into a crippled ("hobble", "limp") determinism. This air of necessity is related to another area of comic parody in *Murphy*: parody of the astrological and the occult.

For *Murphy*, late in the text, the stars form a "system that seemed the superfluous cartoon of his own" (*Mu* 107). The events which have preceded this observation bear it out: the predictions of the astrologer Pandit Suk (whose name identifies him as a caricature of Eastern mysticism), regarded by *Murphy* as a prerequisite to his vocational search, have a wry kind of accuracy. The "Magical Ability of the Eye, to which the lunatic would easy succumb" (*Mu* 22) which Suk attributes to *Murphy*, anticipates *Murphy*'s ocular encounter with Mr Endon; *Murphy*'s equivocal nature is accurately described; as is his matrimonial inadequacy and his future as a "custodian". However the final prediction of a life "not without calamities and setbacks" (*Mu* 23) is something of an

22. See François Voltaire, *Candide*, London, Nonesuch Press (1939), for this constant refrain. Voltaire's maxim is itself a satire at the expense of Leibniz and Beckett's reference recalls both writers.

understatement, given that Murphy is incinerated within a relatively short time. Suk's horoscope is a parody of all such documents: full of ironically significant capital letters, arcane references to items such as the "Square of Moon and Solar Orb" (*Mu* 23)²³, self-evident statements delivered with pseudo-mystical panache, such as "When Health is below par, Regret may be entertained", and an impossibly wide casting of the net of prediction: "With regards to Career, the Native should inspire and lead, as go between, promoter, detective, custodian, pioneer or, if possible, explorer ...". The suggestions contained in this document inspire Murphy, Malvolio-like, to adopt a bizarre job-hunting costume. However, this is not the sole extent of astrological parody in *Murphy*. The text is peppered with mock-significant astrological statements such as "Celia's triumph over Murphy ... was gained about the middle of September ... a little before the Ember Days, the sun being still in the Virgin" (*Mu* 67). The immediate function of these references is to ridicule astrology by an exaggerated notation of the position of stars and moon. The deeper purpose is to suggest a world paralleled and propelled by incomprehensible and slightly absurd forces.

This effect is reinforced by the inclusion of occult fragments: Celia, visiting Murphy, makes a bargain with herself: "If her thumb felt the head she would go up; if her devil's finger, down" (*Mu* 20). The devil's finger prevails, but Celia, responding to a cry from Murphy's room, goes to him in any case. The narrator remarks with mock-foreboding: "Thus the omen of the coin was overruled" (*Mu* 20). To reinforce this foreboding, Celia accidentally breaks a mirror when, startled by Murphy's cries, she drops her handbag. The omens accurately predict the disaster which overtakes Celia.

In *Murphy* mock-superstition achieves its most substantial expression in the sad caricature of a spiritualist medium, Miss Rosie Dew, dachshund owner and sufferer from Duck's disease, a misfortune which allows the narrator to parody the manner and jargon

23. See Robert Harrison, Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, a Critical Excursion, Athens Ga., University of Georgia Press, 1968.

of medical textbooks: "Duck's disease is a distressing pathological condition in which the thighs are suppressed and the buttocks spring directly from behind the knees, aptly described in Steiss's nosonomy as Panpygoptosis" (*Mu* 58). Poor, lonely, besotted, in a spinsterish way, with her dog Nelly and bullied by her patron, whose character may be read from his title, Lord Gall of Wormwood, Miss Dew's spirit control, Lena, gives her cold comfort: "she declared that every century brought a marked improvement and urged Miss Dew to be of good courage. In a thousand years she might look forward to having thighs like anyone else, and not merely thighs, but thighs celestial" (*Mu* 61). As if the thousand-year wait were not discouraging enough, Miss Dew also has to contend with Lord Gall, who sends her banal items - a boot, a pair of socks - from the wardrobe of his dead father and, dissatisfied with the messages from Miss Dew's control, threatens her with dismissal. She is, then, a victim on both the temporal and astral planes.

This chapter shows that the most significant (for narrator, characters and reader) and the most ephemeral issues in *Murphy* are touched with parody and its related phenomena: humour, travesty, burlesque, caricature and literary self-consciousness. This has the effect of reducing the significance of such issues. Man's capacity for rational behaviour is undercut by the bizarre afflictions and affectations of many *Murphy* characters. Macabre humour emphasises the proximity of death and undermines the value of life. The internal definition of humour suggests that it is disorderly and toxic. Literary conventions are parodically exaggerated and thus literature comes to seem merely the combination of narrative conventions. Literary figures, texts and movements are similarly discredited. Parody of the philosophical, theological and occult are also reductive. Murphy lives a debased and simplistically literal-minded version of the abstract ideas of several philosophers, and the result is foolish or disastrous. This mocks the source of those ideas. The theological is also distorted and ridiculed through parody and astrology and the occult are likewise discredited. Thus all systems by which may has previously attempted to make sense of his existence (including art) are invalidated.

CHAPTER IV

WATT

Watt is an unconventionally structured, non-naturalistic work in which those narrative tendencies which produced the parodic, comic self-conscious highlights of *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy* are further consolidated, integrated and brought to fruition. Such tendencies include grotesque and bizarre characterisation; profound existential inquisitiveness and incidental comic parodies of great virtuosity. A concern with the technical constraints of fiction, those constraints which Beckett, in *Proust*, calls (with ironic reverence) "the sacred ruler and compass of literary geometry" (P 2) is reflected in Watt's obsession with the qualities and relatedness of words and things and in a paralleling use and repetition, in the text itself, of words like "simulate", "dissemble", "counterfeit", "represent", "illusion" and "resembling" - all words which draw attention to the artifice with which the text is constructed. Furthermore, an array of mock-narrators fills the text with parodic discourses which investigate, by distorted illustration, various narrative modes and conventions. These narrators include Sam, the putative teller of the entire tale; Arsene, the incumbent in Watt's job, whose monologue on the nature of the work drifts into mock-philosophy and reminiscence; Arthur, the raconteur whose yarn about Louit, research student and aphrodisiac salesman, is broken off before it fulfils its stated objective; and finally the woman Watt meets at the railway station, with her obscure discourse about "the narrows of the menopause" (W 233). The effect of these narrative voices is to establish Watt as the literary equivalent of a central figure in the kind of painting which positions such a figure before walls hung with disparate canvases. When the narrator mocks Watt with "one wonders sometimes where Watt thought he was. In a culture park?" (W 73) his suggestion has a wry kind of accuracy, since exploratory and mocking parodies of aspects of the western cultural tradition do indeed both surround, and emanate from, Watt. In *Watt*, then, the predilection for comic parody and literary self-consciousness which Beckett has exercised in previous fiction is allowed full rein. The result is a work to which Michel Foucault's description of

Don Quixote can be equally and profitably applied. Foucault regards *Don Quixote* as the initial and paradigmatic modern fiction, a

modern work of literature, because in it we see the cruel reason of identities and differences make endless sport of signs and similitudes; because in it language breaks off its old kinship with things and enters into a lonely sovereignty from which it reappears, in its separated state, only as literature; because it marks the point where resemblance enters an age which is, from the point of view of resemblance, one of madness and imagination.¹

Playful, knowing and parodic, *Watt* is in the tradition of *Don Quixote*, *Tristram Shandy* and, in contemporary times, works like Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* or D.M. Thomas' *Ararat*. However, *Watt* is also part of a sequence of literary works to which it is related by common authorship - Beckett's - and by references so pointed that they can only be intended to locate *Watt* in this sequence. For instance, the room in which Murphy dies is illuminated in the daytime by a skylight. At night it frames Murphy's "galactic coal-sack" (*Mu* 106). In the later work, *Watt* is described viewing the stars, "which he had once known familiarly by name, when dying in London" (*W* 212). Arthur has the main character in his story meet the stout porter of Murphy's champagne joke: "And Louit, going down the stairs, met the bitter stout porter Power coming up. And as they passed the porter raised his cap and smiled" (*W* 196). Celia's client in the last chapter of *Murphy* reclines "on his sacrum (which was a mass of eczema)" (*Mu* 156) - an affliction shared by one of the decaying Lynch family in *Watt*. These links are not only retrospective. *Watt* actually appears in the later work, *Mercier and Camier*. Twice, *Watt*'s experience of the perfume of flowering currant is included among the significant events of his life, the events which "meant something from the very beginning, and continued to mean it" (*W* 77). (The precise nature of this meaning is not, however, clarified.) In *The Unnamable*,

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London, Tavistock Publications (1970), p. 49.

the narrator claims to have "invented love, music, the smell of flowering currant, to escape from me" (*U* 280). He specifically denies identification with earlier characters in a way which establishes his familiarity with previous characters in the Beckett canon, including *Watt*: "I am neither, need I say, Murphy, nor Watt, nor Mercier" (*U* 299). Naming his final creation, the character Worm, he reinforces this familiarity by an ostentatious slip: "Worm, I nearly said Watt" (*U* 311). From *Watt* onward, the Beckett texts are linked by more than the kind of similarity one would expect from texts with common authorship, and the characters have more than the kinship which a common source of creation may imply; more, even, than the kinship of comparable dilemma to which Camus refers when he suggests that "it is not so much identical conclusions that prove minds to be related as the contradictions that are common to them".² The texts are explicitly and consciously inter-connected. This does not mean that continuity between texts is complete - that, say, *Watt* is recounted by the *Murphy* narrator. For one thing, Watt's speculation about the disposal of Mr Knott's meals is described as "a tissue now dilating now contracting of thoughts in a skull" (*W* 97), an identification of thought with brain which the narrator of *Murphy*, whose protagonist is obsessed by that gap between mind and matter, would be unlikely to countenance. However, *Watt* marks the beginning of Beckett's technique of using references to connect the texts in his fictional canon in a way which confers a loose unity to that body of work. This technique results in a kind of comic playfulness, where familiar characters, phrases and notions pop up in unexpected places. It also establishes a context for cross-textual self-parody, in which previous works are echoed and spoofed in a way which contributes to the ambience of uncertainty which is the total effect of Beckett's fiction.

Deirdre Bair quotes from Beckett's correspondence with his (then) agent, George Reavey, in which Beckett clearly states his

2. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books (1975), p. 88.

intention that *Watt* should appear to be a text within a sequence of texts. At the same time he provides an interesting judgement about the work, and equally interesting information about the circumstances of its composition:

It is an unsatisfactory book, written in dribs and drabs, first on the run, then of an evening after clod-hopping, during the occupation, but it has its place in the series, as will perhaps appear in time.³

Watt is less unsatisfactory than calculatedly unsatisfying: in its inconclusiveness, in its consciousness of the enigmas of language and cognition and in its denial of the most elementary complacencies. By conventional literary standards of plot interest and resolution, of anticipation and fulfilment on the part of the reader, it is also unsatisfying. For the literary critic, the conscious uncertainty and complexity within the text make interpretation difficult - although not, ultimately, unsatisfying.

Clearly, a central character of an unusual kind is necessary to carry the sustained weight of epistemological and linguistic inquiry in *Watt*, so this discussion of parody in *Watt* begins with characterisation, establishing Watt's special qualities and the way in which these qualities both foster parody, and are illuminated through parody and caricature. The discussion then moves from Watt to his environment. After a brief discussion of the significance of parodies which concern meaning and language, specific parodic areas of the text are isolated and discussed. These areas include Arsene's speech, the incident of the Galls, the Lynch family, the mystery of Erskine's bell and the narrative self-consciousness with which *Watt* concludes. But firstly, by exploring the nature of Watt's character, it is possible to uncover the technical functions (aside from the most apparent motive of comic enrichment) which could only be performed by such a bizarre identity.

3. Deirdre Bair, *A Biography: Samuel Beckett*, p. 364.

In *Watt* Beckett draws even further away from naturalistic, plausible characterisation. Most of the *Watt* people have the one-dimensional quality of traditional comic characters in vaudeville, puppet-shows and in the *commedia dell'arte*. This quality is reflected in the literal accuracy of certain names, so that Watt/what is the embodiment of inquiry, and Knott/not the spirit of nullity. Some names are comically derogatory, like Arsene, or Erskine (Erse can be read as Irish, kine as bovine). The antecedents of these characters are Jimmy the Duck Skyrme and Hermione Nautzche in *More Pricks than Kicks*, and Cooper in *Murphy*. Watt himself is a lineal descendant, in type, of these characters. Unlike them, however, he is portrayed in such detail, with such emphasis on his vulnerability, that he is no longer entirely remote from our compassion. Indeed, his single-minded pursuit of authenticity in language, predictability in events and unity in time and space is as endearing as it is funny. Watt is an important character in the body of Beckett's fiction, because he is the first of a series of threadbare and destitute characters endowed with both comically quizzical energy and with the clear perception of the social pariah.

This perception is comically rigorous but ultimately destructive. Part II of *Watt* begins by describing the household where Watt acts as a servant, its proprietor Mr Knott, and Watt's duties. The description is hedged about with doubt and caution. The most practical details -- like the method whereby Mr Knott's slops are used as garden compost -- are conveyed in pompously inflated language: the slops are emptied "on some young growing thirsty thing at the moment of its most need" (W 64). Then such information is disclaimed, so that the significance which was conferred upon it is mocked: "Watt was not so foolish as to suppose that this was the real reason why Mr Knott's slops were not emptied away on the first floor, as they could so easily have been. This was merely the reason offered to the understanding" (W 64-65). A similar example of the undermining of established significance reads: "Mr. Knott saw nobody, heard from nobody, as far as Watt could see. But Watt was not so foolish as to draw any conclusion from this" (W 66). Watt, then, is a meticulous reasoner,

for whom incidents and observations can only be accepted as existing in themselves, rather than existing as material from which general conclusions can easily be drawn. The narrator seems to be in collusion with this attitude. At best, such meticulousness safeguards Watt and the narrator from accepting erroneous conclusions. At worst, however, Watt and the narrator prevent themselves from accepting any apparent meaning at face value. This can lead to the minimalist and sterile position from which the act of interpreting experience becomes an empty and valueless convention.

Much of *Watt* demonstrates that appearances and impressions may be illusory or deceptive. Moreover, Watt's appearance reveals his general situation. In the early part of the book his appearance provokes Tetty Nixon to call him "A sewer-pipe" (W 16), a comically scatological assessment of Watt's tunnel-vision. Toward the end of the book, when Watt leaves Mr Knott's house, he wears his father's greatcoat, baggy trousers, his grandfather's hat and unmatching second-hand footwear. His costume places him in the same comic tradition as Charlie Chaplin, whose baggy clothing, according to James Feibleman, created the impression of "the cast-off clothes of others, the hand-me-downs of somewhat larger men".⁴ Watt's clothing, too, suggests a personality which is painfully diminished and composite.

Watt's walk is an extension of those descriptions of human mechanisation which were used in *Murphy* to spoof Cartesian ideas about the nature of the physical. However, like his clothing, it illustrates features of his general condition:

Watt's way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as

4. James K. Feibleman, *In Praise of Comedy: A Study in the Theory and Practice*, New York, Horizon Press (1962), p. 244.

far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination, and could sit down. So, standing first on one leg, and then on the other, he moved forward, a headlong tardigrade, in a straight line. The knees, on these occasions, did not bend. ... for some obscure reason. Notwithstanding this, the heel fell, heel and sole together, flat upon the ground, and left it, for the air's uncharted ways, with manifest repugnancy. The arms were content to dangle, in perfect equipendancy. (*W* 28-29).

So Watt jerks along on his fallen arches, twisting and turning in a physical manifestation of his mental acrobatics - which are also notable for attempted precision and an expenditure of energy which exceeds the results they achieve. The slowness ("tardigrade") of Watt's walk suggests lack of real progression through any form of movement, just as his convoluted speculations produce few unquestionable conclusions. The reluctance of his feet to leave the ground implies fundamental insecurity - the desire to cling to a solid surface. On an abstract level, too, Watt seeks the solidity of certainty.

In terms of literary self-consciousness, the wooden, mechanical movement of Watt suggests the way in which unskilfully controlled marionettes move, and may, therefore, be seen as the narrator's implicit comment on his own imperfect character manipulation. In previous works by Beckett, characters have been identified with puppets: in *More Pricks than Kicks* Belacqua and Ruby are described as moving like "fantoccini controlled by a single wire" (*MPK* 87) and the auxiliary characters in *Murphy* are also described as puppets.

Watt's eccentric movement is also comical. Beckett uses this device explicitly for humorous effect in his directions to *Film*, which indicate that the protagonist "should invite laughter throughout by his way of moving. ... He storms along in comic foundered precipitancy" (*Fi* 12). To behave in a manner so extreme as to make a character the butt of such humour clearly sets him apart from his fellows, even within the social context of a narrative as non-naturalistic as *Watt*. Beckett emphasises the oddity of Watt's walk, and Watt's consequent social alienation, by describing the astonishment of a witness, Lady McCann. She tries to rationalise Watt's movements, to explain them away. The possibility of drunkenness is dismissed because of the precision and consistency of the walk. Various physiological reasons, such as piles, venereal disease or flatulence suggest themselves through her recollection of a childhood joke. She also sees similarities between Watt's walk and the behaviour of baited bears - a significant and appropriate comparison, given the torment suffered by Watt through the action of external and internal agents. As it turns out, Lady McCann's prognoses are wrong: late in the text, another description of a walk like Watt's is followed by the suggested remedy: "*the only cure is diet*" (*W* 225). Watt, then, is constipated - a physical condition which mirrors his clogged reasoning. Lady McCann's final response to Watt - she throws a rock at him - identifies her (and the rest of the conformist society which her title suggests she may represent) as a baiter, a tormenter of the unusual or bizarre. Watt's walk, like his speculations, is unusually precise and mechanical, and through both physical and mental exercises he is revealed as a creature beyond the conventional social structure. In setting Watt apart from the kind of drawing-room society represented by couples like Tetty and Goff Nixon, or the social hierarchy which Lady McCann embodies, the narrator establishes a distance between the primary world of the text (Watt and his milieu) and the world of social norms and propriety. However, Watt's estrangement from this social world is only partial: by describing

Tetty's verbal attack on Watt and Lady McCann's physical attack, and by providing Watt with a mind so inquisitive that those assumptions which underpin an entire social structure - assumptions about the relationships between words, things and people - are questioned, the narrator identifies Watt as a victim.

Watt's disposition, appearance and the effect which he has on community representatives fit him for the role of victim. However, the curious theology of *Watt*, which identifies him with the suffering Christ, the victim of a God without compassion, reinforces the association. Soon after Watt arrives at Mr Knott's house, Arsene reminisces about his own arrival and that of his predecessors: "The man arrives! The dark ways all behind, all within, the long dark ways, in his head, in his side, in his hands and feet" (*W* 37). Watt and those servants before him, then, carry the stigmata of the crucified Christ: the marks left by the soldier's spear and the nails. Similarly, late in the narrative, we are told that Watt's "nails pricked his palms" (*W* 226). Sam describes Watt in equally suggestive terms: "His face was bloody, his hand also, and thorns were in his scalp" (*W* 157). Sam also remarks on the resemblance between Watt and Bosch's representation of Christ. A more subtle identification with Christ can be read into Watt's affection for rats, a fondness so deep that it "prejudiced (him) against dogs" (*W* 110). On one level, rats represent a last indicator of hope to the sinking ship which is Watt's sanity - or so the narrator seems to suggest, when he describes Watt's loss of faith in the positive relationship between things and the self as "being so abandoned, by the last rats" (*W* 81). On another level of lost hope, a derogatory parody of theological publications associates rats with religion. During a train journey Watt meets a loathsome Mr Spiro called, with deep irony, "a sensible man at last" (*W* 25). Spiro edits *Crux*, a Catholic magazine which is open, as Spiro, in his cups, candidly points out, "to suckers of every persuasion and freethinkers" (*W* 26).

When Spiro gives examples of *Cruix*'s copy we are confronted with parodies of theological pedantry and pious dialectic, some of which pertains to "*adjuration, excommunication, malediction and fulminating anathematisation*" (W 26) of creatures great and small. Spiro's subscribers clearly have a punitive and malignant God in mind. And this is just the crossword puzzle! The feature article, "*A Spiritual Syringe for the Costive in Devotion*" scatalogically parodies the work of those religious who begin their writing with attempts - often alliterative - to juggle the sacred and the secular. Spiro's monologue culminates in a parody of seminarian speculation, contained in a letter to the editor of *Cruix*. In it, a (probable) chartered accountant blessed with the name Martin Ignatius MacKenzie, writing from Lourdes, questions Spiro about the limits of the miracle of transubstantiation:

- A rat, or other small animal, eats of a consecrated wafer.*
 1. *Does he ingest the Real Body, or does he not?*
 2. *If he does not, what has become of it?*
 3. *If he does, what is to be done with him?* (W 26-27).

This is a parody of theological hair-splitting. A later and equally amusing parody of theology describes Sam and Watt playing God to a rat-substitute for Christ:

... our particular friends were the rats, that dwelt by the stream. They were long and black. We brought them such titbits from our ordinary as rinds of cheese, and morsels of gristle, and we brought them also birds' eggs, and frogs, and fledgelings. ... Or seizing suddenly a plump young rat, resting in our bosom after its repast, we would feed it to its mother, or its father, or its brother, or its sister, or to some less fortunate relative.

It was on these occasions, we agreed, after an exchange of views, that we came nearest to God. (W 153)

There are several levels of parody in this. Sam's archaic idiom - "dwelt by the stream", "bosom", "repast", and his somnolent repetition of mother, father, brother, sister, gives his description

a mock-liturgical quality which is at odds with its shocking subject. Similarly, the last line, which recalls "Nearer My God to Thee", is a hymnal cliché. However its connotation is altered slightly to mean not proximity, but imitation. The God whom Sam and Watt imitate in this sacrificial ritual is the God who delivered Christ up to the mob. On one level, theological language and clichés are parodied by appearing in a description of actions involving rats. On another level, those actions themselves derisively mimic the role of God in the Christian sacrifice. The part which Watt is reported to play in this parodic ritual - the part of oppressor, as opposed to victim - does not mitigate against his own victimised status. Rather his participation in a re-enactment of such a sacrifice - a re-enactment which ignores the resurrection and Christian triumph over death - and his fondness for the creatures which constitute both victim and mob in this ritual, emphasises the grasp which both he and Sam have of the scapegoat syndrome. Watt comprehends and resembles the divine and parodic victim.

As the Spiro and Sam episodes suggest, Watt moves in a world which is rife with parody. In this world all character seems caricatured and all representation is knowingly inauthentic. Watt's radical innocence acts as a foil to the cruelty and oddity which he encounters. This naivety also makes him an unwitting parodist as his search for certainty bypasses compromises and makes cognitive and linguistic conventions seem inauthentic. But he is also a victim of parody. Toward the conclusion of *Watt* he witnesses a distressing caricature of himself.

In Part IV Watt, gently dismayed by the arrival of his replacement, Mr. Micks, leaves the Knott household forever. At the local railway station he buys a ticket to "the end of the line" (*W* 244). This departure probably marks the resumption of his life as a traveller, carried passively to an end which is at once unknown and insignificant. At the station he encounters the eccentrics

who infest such places in the *Watt* world. His fellow-passengers are called, with derogatory and comic economy, names like Arsy Cox, Herring-gut Waller, Cack-faced Miller and Mrs. Penny-a-hoist Pim. As if he is already seeing the external world through the heavy and imperfect glazing of carriage windows, he experiences ripples and distortions of perception.

One of Watt's slips in perception has parodic overtones. Looking back along the highway, he watches the approach of a masculine figure of comical appearance: "on the head there sat, a-sexual, the likeness of a depressed chamber-pot, yellow with age, to put it politely" (*W* 225). This figure, enclosed in a large garment like Watt's greatcoat, also moves like Watt:

The feet, following each other in rapid and impetuous succession, were flung, the right foot to the right, the left foot to the left, as much outwards as forwards, with the result that, for every stride of say three feet in compass, the ground gained did not exceed one. This gave to the gait a kind of shackled smartness, most painful to witness. (*W* 225).

Instead of coming closer, giving Watt the chance to satisfy his curiosity, the apparently approaching figure recedes into the distance. This impossibly disappearing figure clearly resembles Watt. In this incident, play is made with the illusion of replication and unexpected resemblance. Through this play, it is suggested that similarity is superficial, approximate and remote. This is an implicit, but knowing, comment on the nature of any art which attempts to plausibly duplicate experience.

From Watt's point of view, the incident is distressing. The fact that Watt, who has lost the capacity to assign value to experience to the point where "he did not know whether shit was a good thing, or a bad thing" (*W* 225) is dismayed at the sight of himself slipping away indicates the power of the illusion of

resemblance. Yet Watt's mirror-figure is more than an ordinary reflection. Equipped with a urinous head, it is Watt in derisive effigy, a chamber-pot skull mocking his obsession with words, thought and meaning; with the pots and containers and labels of mankind. As such, the figure is a caricature of Watt himself.

Many novels follow the *bildungsroman* tradition, documenting the way in which a character progresses from ignorance to enlightenment. Jane Austen's *Emma* is an example of the type. Watt, however, begins with very little and ends with even less. At the conclusion, words have no meaning for him and meaning is beyond words. Cognition and language are the general parodic subjects of *Watt*. The following discussion introduces the problems of meaning and language which *Watt* suggests, in order to establish the ground for analysis of several parodic clusters as they occur in the text.

Watt was written amid the threat and devastation of war, in a century which has seen religious influence diminish. The faiths which may have been commonly held in previous societies, such as the Christian faith in the medieval world, or even the confidence in *essential* human innocence which Rousseau, in more recent times, expressed, had lost their potency during the time *Watt* was written. The actions and utterances of its central character mock and question all that is left in the absence of confidence in the existence of God or in the benevolence of God and man. The residual faith which is mocked through Watt's questions is the belief in the way in which precise observation of things yields accurate conclusions about their nature and inter-relatedness - conclusions which can be expressed, irrefutably, in words. This is the fixative of perception, cognition and language which comfortably holds man in the world of things and which provides the most essential common ground, the bottom line of coherence, between individuals. Under the scrutiny provided by Watt's painstaking attention to the assumed connections between noticing, thinking and articulating, this essential fixative dissolves.

So does Watt's sanity. The result is the knowing inauthenticity of parody, through which the point is made that a man not blinded by complacency must be maddened by confusion. Germaine Brée deftly identifies the targets of this kind of parody in *Watt* and other Beckett texts, and at the same time hints at the vulnerability of man, unprotected by such stable, meaningful associations:

Samuel Beckett's fictional world, especially *Watt*, contains a quasi-Rabelaisian parody of all the rhetorical and logical devices that have permitted Western man, like Beckett's Ubu-esque creation, the 'man-pot' Mahood, to hold a 'partially waterproof tarpaulin' over his skull.⁵

Ihab Hassan remarks on the inevitability of this kind of parody in *Watt*: "certainty of knowledge is no longer possible; therefore epistemology must become parody".⁶

In *Murphy*, too, Beckett created epistemological parodies. But the juggling of philosophical issues which is so playful (if, ultimately, comically reductive) in *Murphy* becomes threatening in *Watt*. Comparisons between the texts indicate the grim development in Beckett's philosophical parody. In *Murphy*, playful parodies are constructed around the problem of the gap between the qualities of thought and the qualities of brain; and around other conflicts between the abstract - as in the state of meditative withdrawal - and the concrete - as in the pleasures of the flesh. In *Watt* the more extensive problematic gaps between things, people and words give rise to parody. In *Murphy* the escapist protagonist wilfully regresses to a state of primal chaos which exists as a comfortable refuge within his own psyche. In *Watt*, the central character, a confrontationist, progresses toward an incoherence as absolute, but not by any means as acceptable, as Murphy's. Epistemological parody becomes profoundly dismaying. Read together, the texts suggest that the character, like Murphy, who looks for peace within himself

5. Germaine Brée, "The Strange World of Beckett's 'grands articulés'", in Melvin J. Friedman (ed.), *Samuel Beckett Now*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press (1975), p. 74.

6. Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf (1968), p. 31.

ultimately finds a form of disintegration, as does the character, like Watt, who engages with the reality external to himself, rigorously trying to make lasting sense of it. If Watt's inability to make sense of the world represents the necessary response of the uncompromising observer, then the conventions on which we base perception, cognitive synthesis and sharing through language are fraudulent.

Watt is a minimalist, almost a sceptic, with a scientific and empirical cast of mind. His persistent and tenacious search for an elusive certainty of knowledge in the vital areas of perception, cognition and language exposes the vulnerability of the conventions by which we agree on how to observe, think and express ourselves. Watt's inconclusive search for meaning is fundamentally subversive. For example, the following passage describes a fanatically empirical approach to perception which ultimately yields nothing, in terms of knowledge:

Not a sound was made, within earshot, that he did not capture and, when necessary, interrogate, and he opened wide his eyes to all that passed, near and at a distance. ... To the thousand smells also, which time leaves behind, Watt paid the closest attention. And he provided himself with a portable spittoon. (W 82-83)

The characteristic neatness and precision of the spittoon ensures that Watt will always be in a position to bring the entire armory of his senses to bear on the task of observation. However, Watt's sensationalistic empiricism does not confer on him the tranquillizer of certain meaning. Through it, he learns some inconclusive facts about Mr. Knott's sleeping habits, but "the results" of Watt's method, "on the whole, were meagre" (W 83). This incident undermines the accepted value of sense perception.

Specific philosophical parody co-exists with - and informs - generalised parodic inauthenticity in *Watt*. On the basis of strongly

suggestive evidence, much of *Watt* has been interpreted as a parody or at least a fictional extension of certain ideas which Wittgenstein and the Logical Positivists held about thought and language. Critics who uphold the Logical Positivist interpretation have done so because of Watt's "obsessive interest in language" and his method of "imposing a pattern, a pattern of logic"⁷ on things and events. However in the absence of a direct connection between Beckett and Wittgenstein's ideas,⁸ this interest in language can be seen purely as literary self-consciousness. Indeed, if we look for external sources for Watt's interest in words we find, in Beckett's non-fictional prose, repeated evidence of concern with an apparent tension between language and meaning. In *Proust* Beckett writes of "the superstition that form is nothing and content everything ... that the ideal literary masterpiece could only be communicated in a series of absolute and monosyllabic propositions" (P 67). *Watt* contains sparse prose, in which tentative statements are advanced, then qualified, as language is subordinated to meaning. In the light of this statement from *Proust*, much of *Watt* appears to parody the "superstition" that literary language can be pared back to intention and meaning, back to effectual "propositions", rather than to fictionally suggest Logical Positivism.

Beckett does, however, seem to have derived extensive inspiration for specific philosophical parody in *Watt* from the work of David Hume. According to Bertrand Russell, Hume:

started out with a belief that scientific method yields the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; he ended, however, with the conviction that belief is never rational, since we know nothing.⁹

7. Jacqueline Hoefer, "Watt", in Martin Esslin (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: a Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 63.

8. See John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, pp. 87-88.

9. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 644.

This is exactly the pattern which Watt follows. Through the tale of Watt's disintegration, Beckett personifies the Humean position and illustrates its consequences. For Hume, as for Watt, observation, experiment and scepticism provide the basis for reasoning. Yet Watt's experiences suggest that observation is vulnerable to quirks of perception, experiment reveals nothing of value and scepticism leads to intellectual sterility.

Hume held that causality, the "relation between events, processes or entities in the same series"¹⁰ is an illusion grounded in habitual association and convention. Things exist and incidents occur in utter isolation and our minds, confronted with repetition and coincidence, group objects and events together into serial relationships and chains of cause and effect. Watt is distressed above all by singularity: by an incident involving piano-tuners who discover that only one note sounds in Mr. Knott's keyboard, by a painting of a circle and dot, together but unrelated. Unfortunately this distress is inevitable, since he loses faith in cause and effect; in the connection, for example, between the ringing of a bell in the room of Erskine, the upper servant, Mr. Knott's assumed summons and Erskine's nocturnal activity. In *Watt* we witness the suffering of the man who sees diversity within apparent unity, who, in Hume's terms, sees clearly the true nature of the world.

The interpretation of much of *Watt* as a parody of Hume's ideas also illuminates the central mystery of the *Watt* world: Mr Knott. The text of *Watt*, as we shall see later, shifts among dubious narrators and Watt cannot believe in commonplace certainties, but Mr Knott excels even these mysteries. He changes his shape as readily as he changes his clothes. Even the position of his furniture fluctuates. Watt ultimately reaches a degree of acceptance

10. Morris T. Keeton, "Causality", in Dagobert D. Runes (ed.), *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Totowa, Littlefield, Adams and Co. (1960), p. 47.

of the mystery which is his master, but this acceptance is close to resignation. The qualities and function of Mr. Knott become explicable in the light of Hume's view that humanity is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement".¹¹ If we regard this description of flux and movement as a source of inspiration for the bizarre changes which Mr. Knott undergoes, he appears to be a caricature of humanity as Hume sees it. If we turn to Watt, who, applying Hume's methods of empiricism and caution to the mystery of Mr. Knott, merely baffles and dismays himself, we must conclude that Hume's methods will reveal little about mankind. In *Watt*, then, Beckett animates some of Hume's central ideas and in doing so, provides an implicit critique of them. This animation is really caricature, through the personification of selectively exaggerated features of Hume's approach. It is hard to imagine Beckett contemptuously lampooning the work of a convincing (if vulnerable) and well-spoken philosopher who, moreover, boldly claimed his "ruling passion" to be "love of literary fame",¹² and in fact Beckett's treatment of Hume suggests an engagement with the ideas which he ridicules. Beckett's work, especially from *Watt* onward, seems to aim at a zone beyond accepted conventions: social, cognitive and literary.

From Beckett's earliest days as a writer, he has shown an awareness of language as a man-made set of conventions. In "Dante ... Bruno, Vico .. Joyce", the essay which he wrote, as a young man, in celebration of what was to become *Finnegans Wake*, he is definite about the synthetic nature of language: "it is explicitly stated that the choice of names was left entirely to Adam, so that there is not the slightest Biblical authority for the conception of language as a direct gift from God".¹³ This idea that language is

11. David Hume, quoted by Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 636.

12. Robert Paul Wolff, *The Essential David Hume*, p. 11.

13. Samuel Beckett, "Dante ... Bruno . Vico .. Joyce", in *Our Examination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, London, Faber and Faber (1929), p. 14.

a human artifact and is, therefore, by implication, fallible, informs a remark which Beckett made much later in life, when he suggested to Lawrence Harvey that "words are a form of complacency".¹⁴ In Beckett's terms, language is temporal, smug and furthermore, inadequate. Beckett is said to have remarked, during rehearsals of the play "Endgame", that "the more I go on the more I think things are untranslatable".¹⁵ These reservations about language receive fictional expression in *Watt*.

Watt needs to feel that words are anchored to the things to which they are traditionally ascribed as desperately as he needs to feel that meanings will not come adrift from events. Watt needs "words to be applied to his situation" (*W* 78) because names, like meanings, have a palliative, tranquillising effect on him. But in Mr. Knott's house names are fractionally out of accord with things:

Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot ... it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly. For it was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that, that it was not a pot at all. It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say Pot, pot, and be comforted. ... And Watt's need of semantic succour was at times so great that he would set to trying names on things, and on himself, almost as a woman hats. (*W* 78-80)

The hat analogy, with its suggestion of superfluous ornamentation, reinforces the idea of the word as wholly extrinsic to the object which it pretends to represent. For Watt, there is no linguistic certainty and this is not the worst of it, for Watt's uncertainty estranges him from the rest of humanity: "the pot remained a pot ...

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14. Samuel Beckett, quoted by Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, p. 250.
 15. Samuel Beckett, quoted by Clancy Sigal in "Is this Person to Murder Me?", *Sunday Times*, (March 1, 1964), p. 18. In making this comment, Beckett is replying to a general question about whether or not he sees anything new in his work. In context, the comment seems to refer to more than the translation of Endgame from French into English.

for everyone but Watt" (*W* 79). This has the effect of demolishing the assumptions which underpin two vital functions of language: the acceptability of conventional relationships between names and things and communication between people who, with confidence in that relationship, use such names among themselves. Watt may try to call the pot "a shield" or "a raven" (*W* 80) but if he should do so in a conversation with Erskine, the substituted words will not adequately perform a communicative function.

When the narrator describes Watt's loss of faith in his humanity - which is a breakdown in self-perception - it is made clear that this "loss of species" (*W* 82), as well as Watt's loss of confidence in meaning and naming, is a direct result of his situation at Mr. Knott's house:

... when he turned for reassurance to himself, who was not Mr. Knott's, in the sense that the pot was, who had come from without and whom the without would take again, he made the distressing discovery that of himself too he could no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone. Not that Watt was in the habit of affirming things of himself, for he was not, but he found it a help, from time to time, to be able to say, with some appearance of reason, Watt is a man, all the same, Watt is a man, or, Watt is in the street, with thousands of fellow-creatures within call. (*W* 79).

Ultimately, Watt accepts his humanity as a convention, a status conferred in childhood when his mother called him a "little man" (*W* 80). However this acceptance is inadequate; it is based on reminiscence rather than authentic appropriateness and it does not comfort Watt. He has lost confidence in language and in his place within the communality of humanity. For him, the "thousands of fellow-creatures" are not, then, "within call". Watt is utterly estranged.

The preceding discussion introduces the central problems of meaning and language which are to be found in *Watt*. These problems, which create a climate of inauthenticity which is, in general terms, parodic, emerge through the experiences of the persecuted, materially impoverished and servile central character, Watt. Watt's awkwardness contributes to this inauthenticity, since, for him, the most conventionally spontaneous gestures have the quality of imperfectly learned behaviour. This is expressed through the description of his smile: "Watt had watched people smile and thought he understood how it was done" (*W* 23). Watt, then, is an observer and an imitator, a foreigner in the country we assume is his native land. The following discussion selectively and chronologically analyses segments of those complex interlocking structures of parody and its related forms which surround, and issue from, Watt and his environment. The function of this parody, consistent with the purpose of most parody in Beckett's fiction, is to disintegrate coherence and significance.

We meet Watt as a traveller, a shadowy figure in the street and on a train. His origin, features, motives and ultimate destination are obscure. Finally he arrives at Mr Knott's establishment: a largely enigmatic region in which things and people display a mysterious variability. Once inside Mr Knott's house Watt meets Arsene, the servant whom he is to supplant. Arsene delivers a monologue which contains several parodic dimensions.

Arsene's speech is so extended and extensive an example of advice from a vocational incumbent to a vocational neophyte that it parodies such advice in general. Arsene is a little too briskly instructive - "I have information of a practical nature to impart" (*W* 43) - and patronising - "when one man takes the place of another man, then it is perhaps of assistance to him who takes the place to know something of him whose place he takes" (*W* 48-49) - for complete authenticity. However the parody of vocational advice develops fully when Arsene, praising the Knott establishment, assumes the mellifluous tone of a motivator of employee morale:

... because of the nature of the work to be performed, because of its exceptional fruitfulness, because he comes to understand that he is working not merely for Mr. Knott in person, and for Mr Knott's establishment, but also, and indeed chiefly, for himself, that he may abide, as he is, where he is, and that where he is may abide about him, as it is ... calm and glad at last he goes about his work, calm and glad he peels the potato and empties the nightstool ... (W 40)

The menial nature of the work - preparing vegetables and discarding slops - contrasts amusingly with Arsene's persuasive description of job satisfaction, however congenial the employee's surroundings may be. Arsene does convey practical information about Watt's vocational duties and conditions. Watt is to assist other servants in meeting the needs of Mr. Knott, who is incapable of looking after himself. There is great potential for harmony in Mr. Knott's environment. Watt is one of a succession of men of distinct physical type, either "big bony shabby seedy haggard knock-kneed men, with rotten teeth and big red noses" or "little fat shabby seedy juicy or oily bandy-legged men", (W 57) who have served Mr. Knott. Mr Knott is the one constant factor in his establishment. A more subtle anticipation of Watt's fate in the Knott household is embedded in the comparison which Arsene draws between this series of employees and the way in which memories recede and gain prominence: "one always ousting the other, though perhaps ousting is not the word, just as you ousted me, and Erskine Walter, and I Vincent, and Walter that other whose name I forget ..." (W 59). The way in which Arsene, recalling these earlier servants, uses the characteristics of recollection to identify both the function of memory and the series of servants points forward to the way in which Watt will use language and thought to explore the nature of language and thought. Furthermore, Arsene's qualification of the word "ousting" foreshadows Watt's careful consideration of language, in the interests of unattainable precision and authenticity, later in the text.

Arsene suggests that the arrival of the new employee in Mr Knott's house marks a turning-point in the life - previously

characterised by shallow tedium - of that employee. The Knott household is a place where "all (is) forgiven and healed" (*W* 38), where the employee is "light and free", (*W* 38), where, perhaps for the first time, he feels appropriate. Unfortunately, Arsene predicts a state of tension in the new arrival, between the desire to do nothing, "where to do nothing exclusively would be an act of the highest value" (*W* 39) and the necessity to perform the tasks for which he is employed. Watt is assured that adjustment to this necessity brings great - but not permanent - contentment. Arsene describes the way in which his happiness was dislocated by a slight yet intense alteration of perception. He does not elaborate on the mechanism of this change, but its effect is to reduce him to the common human lot of perpetual dissatisfaction. He describes this dissatisfaction in a distorted re-statement of Schopenhauer's ideas about the futility of desire:

The glutton castaway, the drunkard in the desert,
the lecher in prison, they are the happy ones. To
hunger, thirst, lust, every day afresh and every
day in vain, after the old prog, the old booze, the
old whores, that's the nearest we'll ever get to
felicity, the new porch and the very latest garden. (*W* 43)

In the previous chapter, Schopenhauer's views on the "penal servitude" of desire were examined. Since achievement quickly sours, to be superseded by fresh wants, desire is, in Schopenhauer's terms, a primary cause of human suffering. Arsene's quotation of this attitude is less eloquent, but perhaps more forceful than the original, due to his colloquial expression and the banal immediacy of the human desires which he lists. These qualities also help to establish Arsene's speech as a parody of Schopenhauer's argument, which is illustrated with lofty mythological references. Furthermore, Schopenhauer advocates conscious detachment as a solution to the problem of desire, whereas for Arsene this is not possible - in his terms, the happiest state available to him is one of forcible deprivation of the object of his desire and tortuous anticipation

of unattainable fulfilment. So Arsene describes his respective states of gladness and misery during his time at Mr Knott's house in a way which culminates in parody. He also cautions Watt against expecting similar experiences. This caution tends to diminish the posture of useful adviser which he had adopted, and in doing so adds to the parodic quality of that stance.

From the outset, Arsene has not been entirely cheerful or positive - early in the speech, he likens the self to vomit. But from the parody of Schopenhauer's ideas about desire onward, he becomes increasingly grim. His description of desire leads into a tirade of misanthropic bitterness. This is punctuated by a nonsensical poem and a brisk lecture about humour, celebrating "the laugh that laughs ... at that which is unhappy" (W 47). By discussing laughter from within a speech which is itself comical (due, in part, to its exaggeratedly vehement acrimony and in part to amusingly mocking parody) Arsene is using the kind of self-definition with which the narrator of *Murphy* embellished his text. But that narrator, however wry, does not share Arsene's rancour. Yet the speech is not a uniform, flat diatribe. His expression of regret at leaving Mr Knott's house is extremely moving: "sorrow is a thing you keep on adding to all your life long, is it not, like a stamp or egg collection" (W 48). The fact that the collection is a trivial image only adds force to the notion of cumulative despair. Arsene fumbles, in his most pompous moments, with his buttons, gossips about the defunct housemaid, Mary, digresses into speculation about eating, graphically anticipates his own death and solicits praise for his expression - "I speak well, do I not, for a man in my situation" (W 57). In short, he is as pathetic as he is vituperative. One manifestation of this pathos is his inability, or unwillingness, to convey even the early experience of happiness at Mr Knott's house in authentic terms. When he describes that state of harmony enjoyed by the new employee at Mr Knott's establishment he uses images from the world of nature

in a way which parodies pastoral literature, thereby undermining the plausibility of the harmonious state itself. The bliss which follows arrival at Mr Knott's house is suggested through a description of the employee availing himself of "the little paths for his feet, and all the brightness to touch and gather. Through the grass the little mosspaths, bony with old roots, and the trees sticking up, and the flowers sticking up, and the fruit hanging down, and the white exhausted butterflies, and the birds never the same darting all day into hiding" (*W* 37-38). Exaggerated prettiness, a clumsily jaunty description of trees and flowers, discordantly tired butterflies and furtive birds establish a degree of inauthenticity which turns this into a parody of pastoral description. Later in Arsene's speech an even more parodically picturesque description of nature - and seasonal change - is prefaced and concluded with explicitly derisive parentheses: "An excrement ... A turd" (*W* 45-46). A more consciously literary pastoral parody occurs when Arsene uses stiltedly conventional but archaic literary terms to describe "the beauties of the scene, bower and sward, glade and arbour" (*W* 62). In these last two examples Arsene is knowingly mocking. The first example, however, may be an unconsciously parodic, unconsciously derisive attempt to describe a happy individual in a harmonious natural setting. These parodies have the effect of mocking the idea that solace for human misery is to be found in the natural world, and mocking the artistic convention - ornately picturesque language - which enshrines and perpetuates such an idea.

The first part of *Watt* concludes with Arsene's departure and the beginning of Watt's first day under Mr. Knott's roof. Part I establishes the primary features of the *Watt* world. Characters are non-naturalistic: either exaggeratedly mysterious, hostile, repulsive or embittered. Discourse between characters contains both identifiable parodies of certain postures, attitudes, and conventions; and an overlay of parodic inauthenticity. Speculation (as between Hunchy Hackett and Tetty Nixon in the beginning of *Watt*)

consists of inconclusive chains of association. Perception is vulnerable, revealing illusions which cannot be explained - such as the ephemeral visual illusion which Watt experiences after Arsene takes his leave: "the man standing sideways in the kitchen doorway looking at him became two men standing sideways in two kitchen doorways looking at him" (W 62). Watt is an actor in, and victim of, this indeterminate world. As Arsene predicts, Mr Knott's establishment changes Watt. But this change does not quite involve "the sensations, the premonitions of harmony" (W 39) which Arsene has described. Instead, in Mr Knott's house Watt loses his confidence in the genuineness of cognition, language and identity.

The initial example of an incident which throws Watt into a quandary of doubt is the seemingly harmless arrival of "the Galls, father and son" (W 67), a pair of piano tuners. (This name seems to appeal to Beckett, he gave it to poor Rosie Dew's patron in *Murphy*.) The tuners pass gloomy judgement on Mr. Knott's piano, which has degenerated to the point where it can only play a single note. So it cannot produce harmonic relations and functional intervals, since single notes cannot combine in conclusive chords. This deficiency in the Knott instrument mirrors the difficulty Watt has in combining isolated observations and experiences into general interpretations. In Knott's house the abstract artistic expression of the musician (which, because of the lack of concrete properties of sound, is analagous to the equally abstract speculation of the thinker) is limited to a single isolated note. Similarly, the thinker like Watt under Mr. Knott's influence can only see things discretely. Given this connection between the piano and Watt, the general opinion of the tuners is ominous:

The piano is doomed, in my opinion, said the younger.
The piano-tuner also, said the elder.
The pianist also, said the younger. (W 69)

Anyone connected with the Knottian instrument, from instrument

itself to artisan to artist, is doomed.¹⁶

This event, called, punningly, an incident "of note" (W 69) has a curious effect on Watt. He begins to speculate in an uncharacteristically fanciful way. For a start, he assumes that the elder Mr. Gall is blind - although he has no evidence for this. Because the Galls do not look alike, he subjects their filial relationship to the closest scrutiny, asking himself whether they were "perhaps merely stepfather and stepson" (W 67). Confronted with men who are servants of art - in the sense that they tend instruments which facilitate abstract, creative expression - Watt, the careful reasoner, becomes almost imaginatively speculative. When he verbally interprets the relationship between the Galls he is really using his imagination, with the result that he finds a narrative voice and becomes, however briefly, an artist:

How very fortunate for Mr. Gall, said Watt, that he has his son at his command, whose manner is all devotion and whose mere presence, when he might obviously be earning an honest penny elsewhere, attests an affliction characteristic of the best tuners, and justifies emoluments rather higher than the usual. (W 67-68)

The fact that it is an anachronistic, parodic voice, which exaggeratedly imitates the pomposity and bourgeois concern for capital displayed by the kind of narrator who was popular in the nineteenth century, only emphasises its artificial nature.

The Gall visit differs from other intrusions into Watt's solitude (such as when the gardener, Mr. Graves, requests his stout)

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16. Professor Heath Lees has written a detailed study of musical references in *Watt*: "Samuel Beckett's *Watt*: Music, Tuning and Tonality". He argues that "Beckett contrives in a variety of ways to demonstrate that not even music is the ideal, purely musical language, intelligible yet undistorted. On the contrary, says Beckett, music itself is distorted, and incomplete and, like language, forced to surrender its natural life on Western man's altar of systematic reason". My analysis of music in *Watt* is in no way dependent upon Professor Lees' essay, which reached me after the composition of this chapter. His essay is forthcoming in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Issue 9.

in that it has artistic dimensions and it elicits a creative response from Watt. It is therefore an event which belongs to the realm of the imagination. This is reinforced by the description of the incident as like "some story heard long before" (*W* 71). This realm does not lend itself to interpretative certainty, which is why Watt, detecting a "fragility of the outer meaning" (*W* 70) in the Gall incident, finds it profoundly disturbing. Watt needs to fabricate a spurious meaning, an hypothesis, for events of "indeterminate purport" (*W* 71) like the Gall's visit. When he cannot do this, when "incidents resisted all Watt's efforts to saddle them with meaning and a formula", he can "only suffer them" (*W* 76). Explanations comfort Watt, but his native interpretative precision prevents him from regarding them as anything more than panaceas.

The Gall disturbance causes a sophisticated quality to enter into Watt's reasoning. As meanings become utterly dubious, other functions of mind, such as naming and self-perception, also lose reliability. Art, and Watt's own imagination, seem to alienate him further from certainty and meaning. The incident of the Galls is also significant because of its artistic knowingness, which helps to prepare the reader for the intense and sustained literary self-consciousness which informs the final Part of *Watt*.

Meanwhile, curiosity about the disposal of Mr. Knott's table scraps leads into a vast, and vastly parodic, exploration of the relationships between members of the Lynch family, an "immense, impoverished" (*W* 97) local group, all suffering from various grotesque disabilities.

Pondering the fate of Mr. Knott's table-scraps, Watt speculates on the existence of a retainer, equipped with a "famished dog" (*W* 95) which would consume these scraps. The retainer, Watt surmises, must keep a spare famished dog against the time when the functional dog dies, "and so on indefinitely" (*W* 95). So that the situation

will be completely unassailable by chance or accident, Watt's speculation expands to include a second man - and dog - "for ever available" (W 96) as a back-up. He finally concludes that a family, including impoverished men and starving dogs, would be the most appropriate solution to the problem of Mr. Knott's scraps. Watt's speculation becomes (fictional) reality with startling and comic abruptness, as the narrator introduces the Lynch family. Con and Art Lynch, both dwarfs, are the custodians of Kate, Mr. Knott's famished dog. However, the transition from idea to actuality comments amusingly on the inaccuracy of Watt's speculations: the dog is kept by two men, rather than one man (with another man and dog in reserve). The implicit point is that speculation can come close to actuality, but details are likely to vary inexplicably. Within the infinite succession of men and dogs, a further mathematical game is at work as the narrator exhaustively lists the members of the Lynch family, complete with diseases and shortcomings, and their (possibly incestuous) inter-relationships. Their collective age almost adds up to one thousand years and the achievement of this is eagerly anticipated by the Lynches.

The kind of satisfaction which Watt derives from the scraps=dog=man=family=man=dog=scraps system is pointed out explicitly:

... once Watt had grasped, in its complexity, the mechanism of this arrangement, how the food came to be left, and the dog to be available, and the two to be united, then it interested him no more, and he enjoyed a comparative peace of mind, in this connection. (W 115)

Watt realises that he has not "penetrated the forces at play" (W 115) - that he has not really grasped the permutations of the situation. Like so much of *Watt*, this suggests that understanding, even when every variable has been explored, is impossible. But Watt's contentment arises from having transformed "a disturbance into words, he had made a pillow of old words, for his head" (W 115).

Recognising the inadequacy - even sophistry - of his analysis, Watt finds satisfaction in the analysis itself, rather than its pretensions to accurately represent the situation. Meanwhile, the precisely interconnected system of the Lynch family is denigrated through the unsavouriness of its members. However, one element of the system as a whole is also undermined, and through this, the efficacy of the entire structure is questioned. The postponement - through the death of Liz - of the date when their collective age will reach one thousand, suggests that the most exact calculations are vulnerable to random chance. The rational system is shown to be fundamentally incompatible with human mutability and regeneration. The synthetic and organic are antipathetic.

Vivian Mercier has pointed out that one of Beckett's "master-metaphors for life" is "the inherent paradox of a finite number of possibilities repeated to infinity".¹⁷ Of course, infinity can only be suggested within the limited context of a work of fiction. In *Watt* Beckett plays with the idea of complete precision and situations in which repetition to infinity is implied. This type of play is parodic, since at the same time as it imitates a mathematically precise system, it tends to point up the limitations of such systems. The Lynch family is a sustained example of this parodic inconclusiveness. So too is the apparently endless series of servants which Arsene describes to Watt in Part I. There is, however, a further parodic element in the Lynch episode. Poor, profligate, drunken and numerous, the Lynches are caricatures of the Irish peasantry. Through the sordidness of their circumstances, Beckett implicitly mocks the attitude which glorifies the indigent Irish and, by extension, the literature based on such an attitude. The target represented by The Poet in *More Pricks than Kicks* is still, apparently, ripe for attack.

Once Watt has experienced the satisfaction of the pseudo-analysis which the probability, then existence, of the Lynches leads

17. Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition*, London, Oxford University Press (1962), p. 16.

him to formulate, the narrator turns his attention to the relationship between Watt and Erskine, his superior (both in terms of vocational seniority and actual location, since Erskine works in the upper levels of the Knott house). This segment of the *Watt* text is important because it builds on the artistic self-consciousness of the Gall incident by introducing a further musical image - the enigma of the broken bell. The bell itself becomes a metaphor for the microcosm of humanity which shelters under Mr Knott's roof. At the same time, the Knott establishment is revealed as a travesty of the Renaissance ideal of a productive relationships between patron and artist, in a sympathetic environment. Watt is aware of the likelihood that he will, in time, supplant Erskine. Speculation about the rules which govern obsolescence and replacement in Mr. Knott's establishment obsesses Watt, who considers the obvious mechanism, a human chain of causation, "too horrible to contemplate" (*W* 132-133). If causation is rejected, so that hypothetically, "Tom's two years on the first-floor are not *because of* Dick's two years on the ground floor" (*W* 132), replacement must take place individually - in which case the actual mechanism is a mystery, and Watt must suffer the pain which results from being unable to explain the phenomenon to his satisfaction. Ultimately, Watt's conjectures on this subject fail and he drifts into the easeful memory of the cries of frogs which he once listened to, when lying in a ditch as a young man. The narrator records these with comical mock-precision, carefully spelling out the differences between varieties of frog-pronunciation and marking the intervals between cries. This neat codification of the random music of the frogs also ridicules Watt's need to find a code of rules for Knottian promotion, which is, as he discovers, indeterminate. One morning Erskine is absent and a new servant, Arthur, appears, as Watt did, in the kitchen. The situation has resolved itself.

The signature of this mystery of promotion and disappearance is the sound of a bell, which is associated with Erskine (whose bell

puzzles Watt a great deal) and with Arthur (whose arrival is accompanied by the sound of bells). The existence and purpose of Erskine's bell is initially quite clear and definite: "Watt had heard the bell sound, and Erskine get up and go down, often enough to know that sometimes in the night Mr. Knott pressed a bell and that then Erskine, doubtless in obedience to the summons, got up and went down" (*W* 119). At first the isolated nature of this bell - the only one, to Watt's knowledge, in the house - begins to trouble Watt. He cannot come to terms with its singularity and before long he is demolishing his reasonable explanation of the bell and its function with a cluster of doubts: Who actually activates the bell? Where does it sound? Is it a bell tone at all, or merely a snore? Is it all a trick played by Erskine? Watt has no way of knowing, and does not trust Erskine sufficiently to ask. The uncertainty distresses Watt, who finally searches Erskine's room, hoping that if he finds the bell it will provide him with answers. The narrator seems to think this unlikely - the imagery used to describe the contentment which Watt would derive from finding a bell in Erskine's room suggest that Watt's method of inquiry can only disclose the disposable periphery, the peel, rather than the core of the problem. After examining Erskine's room Watt "would be able to put the matter from him, and forget it, as one puts from one, and forgets, the peel of an orange, or of a banana" (*W* 121).

In Erskine's room Watt finds a broken bell - which denies as much as it confirms. This problem of the bell illustrates Watt's scepticism and his empiricism (to remove his doubts he needs to actually see and touch the bell in Erskine's room). It also illustrates the way in which reasonable explanations crumble, in the *Watt* world, leaving nothing, or leaving the partial accuracy of a dog kept by two men, or of a broken bell. Once inside Erskine's room, the mystery of the bell is displaced, for Watt, by curiosity about the picture on Erskine's wall. This picture shows a precise black circle with a gap in the lowest point of the arc. The circle seems to occupy the central foreground. Apparently in the background,

to the right of the circle (from Watt's point of view) is a blue dot. These two figures, black and blue, appear against a white ground. After some experimentation, Watt decides that this is the only appropriate way for the painting to hang - it cannot be inverted or tilted on its side. This painting really provides material for uncertainty, for it depicts an optical teaser, since each figure seems alternately to occupy the foreground or recede into the distance. Moreover the relationship between the figures is ambiguous - is the dot the lost centre of the circle? If so, which is seeking which? Watt weeps at the possibility that the dot and the circle are looking for a circle and a dot, respectively, to complete themselves, but that the circle which the dot seeks, and the dot which the circle seeks, are not those depicted. From this aspect, the painting represents the geometry of loneliness. However there is another possible interpretation. The circle and dot resemble a broken bell: either a cross-section of a hand-bell (the open-ended circle) with a detached tongue (the dot); or an electric bell of the kind which operates in telephones, in which case the circle would suggest the bell itself, while the dot would approximate the ball of the hammer which produces sound. Neither the hand-bell with a distant tongue or the electric bell with a distant hammer is capable of a note. This painting may contain an implicit comment on the nature of graphic art, since even a naturalistic graphic depiction of a bell is incapable of actually making a sound. The painting in Erskine's room, then, may be making the point that the function of an object is distinct from its representation, in the same way that Magritte's painting in which a pipe is represented carries a disclaiming inscription: "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*". The irony here is that the *actual* bell in Erskine's room is also soundless.

The various bells in *Watt* - the bell tone which is associated with Erskine and Arthur, the actual broken bell in Erskine's bedroom, and the painting, possibly of a bell, which hangs on Erskine's wall - represent more than a playful commentary on the

quality and purpose of an object in life and in art. The bells also stand for the situation of the employee in Mr Knott's house. The painting, which may be a stylised representation of a bell, or at the very least is associated with the bell in Erskine's room, in that curiosity about Erskine's bell draws Watt to the painting, is "a manner of paradigm, ... a term in a series, like the series of Mr Knott's dogs, or the series of Mr Knott's men" (*W* 129). Like the single potential piano note in the Gall incident, the sound of the bell is solitary, unrelated to musical intervals and harmonic structures. Also like the piano note, the bell tone can recur, but each occurrence will be unrelated to previous or potential sounds or related only through coincidence. So the relationship between the notes is one of tonal similarity, rather than a kind of musical causation (as in the recurrence of a theme in a conventional musical work). Similarly, men appear singly at the threshold, or in Arthur's case, in the kitchen, of Mr Knott's house. They are not linked in any structure of causation or systematic relation (causation and mathematical systems are regarded with doubt or ridicule in *Watt*) as they might be in the outside world. The fact that Arthur, arriving from outside, is accompanied by many bells, whereas Erskine, the resident in Mr Knott's house, is associated with a single bell tone, emphasises the distinction between the interlocking masses outside, and the solitary servant within. The fact that this isolation of servants is conveyed through references to graphic, musical and literary art (much of Part II is knowingly literary) adds a playful dimension to the text. But essentially, the indeterminate series of men and their isolated notes undermines the idea of artistic or organic congruence.

This structural separateness, which in Watt's case is exacerbated by conceptual and linguistic isolation, does not mean that the Knott household is unsociable. The rest of Part II concerns Watt's companions in the Knott household. There is Mrs Gorman, with whom Watt conducts a desultory, unconsummated affair of the senses. Having focussed at such length on the ultimate sterility of Watt's intellectual contortions, it is as if the narrator feels obliged to provide corresponding information about

his fruitless physical efforts. As well as Mrs Gorman, Watt has Mr Graves the gardener for company and conversation. Mr Graves has a comical turn of phrase which is reminiscent of Dr Fist's idiom in *Murphy*:

Mr. Graves pronounced his *th* charmingly. Turd and fart, he said, for third and fourth. Watt liked these venerable Saxon words. And when Mr. Graves, drinking on the sunny step his afternoon stout, looked up with a twinkle in his old blue eye, and said, in mock deprecation, Tis only me turd or fart, then Watt felt he was perhaps prostituting himself to some purpose. (W 142)

Mr. Graves' comical pronunciation parodies the way Dubliners speak. The fact that it is this incidental humour which makes the job worthwhile for Watt confers, retrospectively, an ironic quality to Arsene's prediction of employee satisfaction in the Knott establishment. As well as Erskine, Mrs. Gorman, Mr. Graves and the Lynch twins, Watt from time to time sees and hears Mr. Knott himself, although his association with Mr. Knott is oblique. Mr. Knott is the central obscurity in the establishment, his actual shape alters and his language, or rather, the noises which he makes, is incomprehensible to Watt.

Mr. Knott is like an eccentric, flamboyant Renaissance prince. He has the latitude for personal idiosyncrasy which power allows and the capacity for patronage, the protective quality, which causes the narrator to compare him to "harbour, ... haven, calmly entered, freely ridden, gladly left" (W 133). (In view of Arsene's reluctant departure, this analogy is somewhat ironic, and indeed the narrator contradicts it immediately, while affirming the nurturing qualities of the Knott establishment.) The trappings of culture - music, painting, discourse, and ornamental horticulture - are evident in Mr. Knott's house. Like a patron-prince, Mr. Knott supports an artist, a philosopher, an alchemist and a musical *connaisseur*.

However, the discourse is bitter and misanthropic (Arsene's speech) or scatologically comical (Mr. Graves'); the music is the isolated potential note of a decayed piano, or the single tone of a remote and broken bell; the painting depicts an optical illusion and is, itself, a transitory object; and the garden is commonly used as a urinal. Watt is an artist - in that he performs an imaginative, but parodically ridiculous amplification of the Gall relationship; a philosopher - in his tenacious, but unfortunately unsuccessful attempts to understand and know; something of an alchemist - through his duties as culinary chemist which require him to labour over the diverse foods, drink, preventative medicines, seasonings and preservatives which combine to form Mr Knott's diet; and a connoisseur of the single, barely believable note produced by the broken bell. Like a good client, Watt averts his gaze from his patron's face, fearing yet longing to directly meet Mr. Knott's eyes. But Watt does not flourish under Mr. Knott's patronage. After his time on the ground floor he is "littler, poorer ... sicker, aloner" (*W* 147) and his novitiate ignorance has become a painful awareness of the limits of meaning and language. Patron, refuge and suppliant are respectively so disinterested, shabby and run-down that the ideal which the relationship between them suggests - that of a haven for cultural activity, provided, organised and presided over by a powerful figure - is travestied. Part II describes Watt's suffering and decline in this non-refuge, as every aspect of his perception and comprehension assumes an inauthentic quality.

Part III begins with the first sustained authorial interjection in *Watt*: a direct first-personal address by the avowed narrator Sam, who reminisces about his acquaintance with Watt. This pair have met and sometimes spoken in a garden surrounding separate dwellings which the narrator calls "mansions" (*W* 149). Despite this grand and Biblical term, it seems likely that both are incarcerated in an asylum - they are among lunatics, or at least, depressives, whom the narrator calls "scum, cluttering up the passageways, the hallways, grossly loud, blatantly morose" (*W* 150).

As well as describing shared activities, such as the ritual of rat-sacrifice (which was discussed earlier in this chapter) the narrator sets out the circumstances under which he received the text itself. His claims are knowingly spurious. Consideration of the function of Sam, of the shortfall between his claims for authorship and the reality which is apparent in the text, of the nature of his intrusions and the purpose of his deputies (those other speakers whose discourse is included in the text), reveals parodic mockery of both the storytelling stance adopted by Sam and the narrators he subsumes, and the product of that stance: the text itself.

The professed companionship between narrator and character is similar to the relationship between the narrator of *More Pricks than Kicks* and Belacqua in the story "Ding-dong". In *Watt*, as in the earlier work, this technique confers a quality of authenticity: the text has the veracity of information received in the extra-fictional world. But just as in Part II of *Watt*, any matter which appears to possess truth or significance immediately has these qualities withdrawn, so the apparent accuracy of a work which Watt conveys to the narrator "as one speaking to dictation, or reciting, parrot-like, a text" (*W* 154) is undermined. The narrator overtly diminishes his own credibility, that of his informant and, as a consequence, the authenticity of the text itself.

Watt's "parrot-like" method of recitation implies that the text is an exact transcription of the experience of its central character, who therefore is a narrator himself, at one remove from the reader because his story is actually set down by Sam. However, Sam makes it clear that this is not the case. By emphasising the shortcomings of Watt's discourse, he also draws attention to the fictional content of the text itself. Watt's delivery, pitched low and fast, is difficult for Sam to hear and follow and Watt's "scant regard for grammar, for syntax, for pronunciation, for enunciation, and very likely, if the truth be known, for spelling too" (*W* 154) makes accurate transcription unlikely. (At the same

time, the way in which Sam forms opinions about spelling on the basis of a verbal discourse makes it difficult to believe in his desire for accuracy.) Watt's communicative inadequacy is complicated when he lapses into inverted articulation, of increasing irregularity. Following Sam's instructions, the reader is able to translate Watt's private language into approximate English - in the most extreme instance, such a translation reads: "*Sid by sid, two men. Al day, part of nit. Dum, num, blin. No. Knot look at, Wat? No. Wat den us do? Niks niks niks. Part of nit, al day. Two men, sid by sid.*" (W 166). The examples of Watt's distorted speech pertain to a time, not revealed earlier in the text, when he was Mr. Knott's personal servant, assisting with shaving, bathing and dressing. During this time Watt experienced sensory breakdown: "*Now failing eyes, ears. So I moved in mist, in hush*" (W 162). Another speech, about "*skin*", "*smel*" and "*tung*" implicates touch, smell and taste in this failure. For an empiricist, sensory deprivation results in a breakdown of cognition, and this appears to have been Watt's ultimate fate in the Knott household. The "niks" which Watt describes as his, and Mr. Knott's occupation during this time, suggests *nichts*, that is to say, nothing, and indeed Watt seems to have experienced incommunicable obscurity. The way in which an approximation of this obscurity is communicated makes the reader (who must, if he is to understand Watt's speech, apply to it Sam's analysis of the manner of Watt's inversions) as much a translator and interpreter of difficult material as is Sam, its initial auditor and apparent editor. So the reader is vitally involved in the actual construction of the text. This has the inevitable effect of heightening the reader's awareness of the literary nature of *Watt*. And when Sam imputes irregular spelling to Watt, without the evidence which only Watt's written words could supply, then confirms this unverifiable assessment by using irregular spelling in those speeches which he records (presumably) *verbatim*, the reader is made aware that the narrator is a fabricator who is equipped to confer veracity on his fabrications. So in the initial section of Part III Sam describes Watt's degeneration into a state of semi-coherence which is strangely

systematic. At the same time, doubt is cast on Watt's reliability as an informant. His discourse is partial and - finally - so difficult to comprehend that the reader must impute responsibility for the text at large to Sam. Earlier in the work, Sam has been at pains to create the impression that he is engaged in reportage which is as accurate as possible, while acknowledging the likelihood, even necessity, of falsification:

... all that I know on the subject of Mr. Knott, and of all that touched Mr. Knott, and on the subject of Watt, and of all that touched Watt, came from Watt, and from Watt alone. (W 123)

And this does not mean either that I may not have left out some of the things that Watt told me, or foisted in others that Watt never told me, though I was careful to note down all the time, in my little notebook. (W 124)

In the beginning of Part III, this description of the process by which the text was created implies, by extension, a description of its narrator: Sam is a listener, a writer and a translator, but he is no amanuensis.

However there are subtle indications in this section of *Watt* that Sam himself is unreliable, and these indications are borne out by an examination of the rest of the text. For a start, he refers to Watt's garden companion - supposedly himself - in the third person as "Sam" (W 151). This distances the actual storyteller from Sam, hinting that Watt's acquaintance might merely be another character, with whom the true narrator only partly identifies. The fact that Sam compares himself to "a mad creature" (W 156) also undermines his factual and informative stance, which casts doubts on his credibility. The description of large gardens, divided according to a mysterious and possibly lunatic plan, creates an air of imaginative licence which diminishes the plausibility of Sam's supposedly factual descriptions. When we look at the text at large, we come across evidence which *appears* to support the editorial stance which Sam has adopted. Occasional question-marks

in the body of the text seem to testify to Sam's bafflement and his unwillingness to simply fill the gaps in Watt's speech with falsified material. However the question-mark, like Sam's ostentatious qualification of statements made in the text, is such an exaggeratedly editorial device that it mocks editorial convention.

More damaging still, Part I of *Watt* in which Hackett and the Nixons converse, before Watt arrives on the scene, contradicts Sam's information on the reception of the text, since Watt himself can have no knowledge of Hackett's character and motives or the reported conversation between the Nixons and Hackett. So this part of the text, at least, cannot have originated in Watt's mumbled recitation. Moreover, the nature of the text itself is at odds with Sam's claim that he faithfully recorded Watt's speech where possible, and edited it where necessary, since it bears unmistakable characteristics of a crafted artifact. For example, Hunchy Hackett's deformity, he tells Tetty, is the result of a fall from a ladder. Arsene makes a joke about ladders - "Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away" (*W* 42) which is at once an idiomatic parody at the expense of the Welsh¹⁸ and a clear repetition of the circumstances of Hackett's accident. Since such coincidence of images occur more frequently in literature than in life, this echo reinforces the fictional status of the text. So do the instances of playful, mocking, literary and artistic self-consciousness. For example, the twin dwarfs who escort the famished dog Kate to her supper are called Art and Con. This suggests that art and confidence tricks are closely related and that both are somehow stunted and grotesque. Late in the text, the moon is described in a way which

18. See John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 75 for identification of the idiom and for a discussion of the critical arguments which Arsene's remark has been made to serve. The joke about the absent ladder appears in *Murphy*, too, when Murphy ensures that the approach to his garret is secured, by having the access ladder unscrewed. "Do not come down the ladder, they have taken it away" (*Mu* 106).

draws attention to fictional clichés on the subject: "The moon, if not full, was not far from full, in a day or two it would be full, and then dwindle, until its appearance, in the heavens, would be that compared, by some writers, to a sickle, or a crescent" (W 221). This recalls the way in which the narrator of *More Pricks than Kicks* knowingly manipulates the moon in his text. Both instances suggest the distinction between fictional reality and the reality of natural phenomena in the extra-fictional world, and fictional reality, of necessity, involves fabrication by the narrator. This demolition of Sam's credibility has the effect of identifying him as a mock-narrator, a manifestly unreliable imitation of the editor and storyteller whom he claims to be. As an inauthentic imitation of a narrator, through whom implicit comments about the qualities of textual construction are conveyed, Sam parodies the role of narrator itself.

If Watt is an unreliable informant, and Sam is an inauthentic narrator, with whom does the responsibility for the *Watt* text lie? The existence of parenthetical comments like "(Hiatus in MS.)" (W 239); "(MS. illegible)" (W 240); and the addenda, of which we are told that "only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation" (W 247) suggest that a narrator/editor stands behind the discredited Sam. These comments cannot be the work of Sam, who, if we were believable, would have unintentionally created such a hiatus, such illegibility and such detritus, and would therefore be unlikely to remark on it. The true editor/narrator who, given the complexity of this issue, cannot satisfactorily be identified as Beckett himself, remains as cryptic and mysterious as Mr. Knott. However, the fact that Beckett has given his discredited narrator his own Christian name, Sam, is both a symptom of his capacity for comic self-mockery and an indicator of his awareness of the inherent ambiguities of narrative voice.

Sam's "information" (W 167), which begins Part III of *Watt*, leads back into Watt's putative reminiscence about events which

took place during his time at Mr. Knott's house. The incident which Sam goes on to describe is the comically digressive, inner-narrative of Arthur, Erskine's successor. Through Arthur's tale, the posture of raconteur is mocked. The story also caricatures the members of an academic committee and parodies the idea of numerical precision.

Arthur's tale begins as advice to the sexually impotent Mr. Graves. But his expression is so exaggeratedly pompous and anachronistic that it parodies the attitude of consolation: "Do not despair, Mr. Graves. Some day the clouds will roll away, and the sun, so long obnibulated, burst forth, for you, Mr. Graves, at last" (W 167-168). This comically formal address sets a parodic tone for the rest of Arthur's discourse which, he says, illustrates the efficacy of a contraband aphrodisiac: "Bando".¹⁹ In fact, the story is about Arthur's university comrade, Ernest Louit, who, having fraudulently spent college funds in the course of comically dubious research (entitled "The Mathematical Intuitions of the Visicelts") defends his actions before an academic committee. The tale breaks off without mention of its intended subject: Louit's adventures as a Bando smuggler. So in terms of its stated objective, Arthur's story is a failure and this combines with his initially inflated delivery to ridicule the narrative stance which he has assumed. Furthermore, there is a dimension of literary self-consciousness to Arthur's tale which highlights its fictional qualities and in doing so, reinforces his status as failed storyteller. Arthur interrupts himself to complain about the details which he regards as vital to the telling of his tale, contrasting his necessarily precise narrative method with the "freedom" of the fatalistic rule-of-thumb by which Mr. Graves plants seeds in the garden. This awareness of the frustration and constraints of narration identifies Arthur's attempt as knowing and serious; rather than a naive and rambling reminiscence, designed to pass the time. His failure to continue and resolve his story is, in

19. The parodic qualities of the Bando recommendation itself are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

the light of his deliberations about storytelling, especially significant. There is, however, a deeper level of fictional awareness in Arthur's story. After his discourse has finished, we are told that Louit's defence before the academic committee, in which he presents a supposedly Visiceltic mathematician to vindicate his theory, is a complete fabrication. The Visicelt's "real name was Tisler and he lived in a room on the canal" (*W* 198). His mathematical knowledge is meagre and his apparent intuition is rote-learned. The fact that Arthur omits this punchline, while describing at length Louit's false representation, comments negatively on Arthur's narrative selectivity, aligning him with the fraudulent fiction which is Louit's defence. So Arthur is a mock-raconteur, because his story falls short of its aims on a literal level (of describing the Bando trade) and on a literary level (of attaining narrative precision).

Within this parodic narrative framework, it is implied that funding for academic research is based less on merit than on audacity and sexual alliances (Louit has a liaison with the college bursar who ratifies his grant). Further mockery of the university system occurs through the interaction between Louit and his inquisitors, which is characterised by pig-Latin, niggling dispute, elaborate deference and irrelevant interjections. The physical shortcomings of the individual members of the committee, which range from a speech defect to flatulence, combine with their verbal nonsense to ridicule the participants and functions of such gatherings in general.

Arithmetic, which is traditionally held to be an abstract and certain discipline, does not escape from this episode unscathed. The supposedly rustic Visicelt, called (by Louit) Mr. Nackybal, seems able to intuitively provide the cube and square roots of large numbers in short order, without the benefit of the most elementary degree of numeracy. But Mr. Nackybal's diseased physique -

he is the victim of "a diffuse ano-scrotal prurit" (W 181) - provides a comically reductive counterpoint to the apparent purity of his conclusions. This suggests that numbers - however precise and remarkable - are uncertain in that they issue from individuals, who are vulnerable to physical corruption. The way in which Mr. Nackybal seems to arrive at his conclusions using intuition rather than orthodox methods of reasoning implies that accuracy is not integral to mathematics. In fact, however, Mr. Nackybal, who is not a Visiceltic peasant, achieves his answers by trickery. This deception points to another target for parody in the Louit tale: the supposedly native wisdom of rustic folk. In costume, before the committee, Mr. Nackybal is a caricature of a sagacious peasant.

Part III of *Watt*, then, consists chiefly of sustained and parodic mockeries of the position of narrator. A contrived inauthenticity signals the parodic quality of narration, and through this inauthenticity it is implied that the text itself is unreliable, founded on palpable falsity and unfulfilled claims, constructed amid difficulties, constraints and irritations. This adds a further dimension of doubt to a work which has already canvassed the possibility that seeing, naming and thinking are not quite the predictable processes that they may commonly seem to be.

The final Part of *Watt* describes the events of Watt's expulsion from the Knott establishment as, like Arsene before him, he confronts his replacement, Mr. Micks, and resumes his itinerant life. As in the preceding text, the description of events blends with parody of literary models, literary self-consciousness and incidental humour.

Mr. Micks himself is a vehicle for parody. He tells Watt his life-story in a way which parodies the *roman-à-clef* in that his quoted statements are embedded in a comically derisive commentary which ridicules the very act of autobiographical description. These statements themselves are so pompous that, taken in conjunction with the narrator's use of a nineteenth-century literary device (the

self-censoring dash) Mr. Micks' actual remarks parody the style of nineteenth-century narrative:

I come from ----, said Mr. Micks, and he described the place whence he came. I was born at ----, he said, and the site and circumstances of his ejection were unfolded. My dear parents, he said, and Mr. and Mrs. Micks, heroic figures, unique in the annals of cloistered fornication, filled the kitchen. He said further, At the age of fifteen, My beloved wife, My beloved dog, Till at last. Happily Mr. Micks was childless. (W 215)

Watt himself is beyond appreciation of the content of Mr. Micks' speech, although he is able to enjoy the sound: "the fricatives in particular were pleasing" (W 215). This suggests that Watt has given up faith in communicable information. At the same time, we are reminded that a discourse - verbally at least - is no more than a shifting phonetic combination.

The occurrence of two more speeches is recorded in Part IV. The first is produced by Watt in the railway waiting-room. It is "a disquieting sound, that of soliloquy, under dictation, and proceeded with care" (W 237). This is the monologue which Sam has described as the source of the *Watt* text itself. The fact that Watt begins to produce it only after he has, for the most part, lost faith in thought, knowledge and communication, suggests that lack of confidence in basic conventions is necessary to a storyteller, which is the role Watt finally assumes, both as Sam's informant (although Sam's doubtful credibility makes this ambiguous) and as the obscure speaker in the railway waiting-room. The other muttered discourse, which seems to be on the subject of railway furniture and the menopause, is spoken by a woman named Price (perhaps she is a serious manifestation of Watt's fellow-traveller: Mrs. Penny-a-hoist Pim).

In a more comical and mocking vein of literary self-consciousness, Mr. Case, the railway signal-man, is described in the act of reading "*Songs by the Way*, By George Russell (A.E.)" (W 227). This is the

Irish writer whose other fan among Beckett characters is smelly Miss Carridge in *Murphy*. Once again, Russell's work is ridiculed by being placed in the hands of a repulsive reader:

Mr. Case's heavy moustache followed the movements of his lip, as it espoused, now pouting, now revulsed, the various sonorities of which these words were composed. His nose too responded, with its bulb and nostrils. The pipe moved up and down, and from the corner of the mouth the spittle fell, unheeded, on the waistcoat, which was of corduroy. (*W* 227-228)

Again, words are revealed as collections of sounds, of "various sonorities". The inclusion of this reader, mouthing the words of the writer as he dribbles above the page, is more than a specific ridicule of *Songs by the Way*, it is also a mocking and distorted reflection of the activity of the reader of the *Watt* text itself.

Watt concludes with an addenda in which the rags and bones of narrative, graphic and musical art appear in discontinuous pastiche. Here, fleeting images, fragments of verse, isolated commentary on the preceding text, snippets in different languages, discontinuous descriptive or anecdotal items and a (vocal) musical score create the illusion of the *Watt* manuscript in a pre-editorial phase. Just as the main character disintegrates during the course of the work, so the text itself is regressive, proceeding from original clarity through the narrative uncertainty which occurs when Sam assumes control, to a state of partial coherence in the addenda. The effect is to highlight the fragility of surety and unity on both existential and literary planes.

The vital role of parody in this process of disintegration has been demonstrated in the course of this chapter. There are two interlocking parodic dimensions in *Watt*: parodies which mock specific targets and a climate of uncertainty so pervasive that everything becomes parodic - which is to say, exaggeratedly imitative

and pointedly inauthentic. The specific parodies buttress this overall parodic structure. For example, Watt's concern with the trueness of language which is related to Sam's dubious narration and other clusters of literary self-consciousness in the text (in that linguistic uncertainty implicitly establishes a forum for textual uncertainty) form part of a general climate of parodic inauthenticity, the target of which is the veracity of words and stories. Specific idiomatic parodies - such as Mr. Graves' speech and the Welsh ladder which Arsene mentions - mock the idiosyncratic way in which words (supposedly uniform and standardized agents of communication) are used in the "real" world, that is, the world external to the text. In this way extra-fictional reality is imported into the text and, through parody, shown to be as vulnerable to ridicule and as potentially deceptive as the parodic target in the inter-textual world. In this way specific parody reinforces general parody in *Watt*.

CHAPTER V

THE IMMEDIATE PRECURSORS OF THE TRILOGY

After *Watt* was completed and Beckett's wartime confinement to Roussillon ended, his circumstances and inclination made a prolific writing phase possible. The (published) fiction which dates from the beginning of this phase came to be known in English as the novel *Mercier and Camier*; stories "The Expelled", "The Calmative", "The End"; and another short novel *First Love*. Chronologically, stylistically and thematically, these fictions are direct precursors of Beckett's most accomplished work: the trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. Two notable characteristics distinguish the products of Beckett's post-war creativity from his previous fiction: the initial composition of the texts in French and (with the exception of *Mercier and Camier*) the intense and sustained use of first-person narration.

Beckett's motives for changing languages are still unclear, despite the critical speculation which this change has generated. The most likely explanation is that Beckett found it easier to achieve uncluttered prose in French. Richard Seaver supports this view with a quotation from Beckett's correspondence with Niklaus Gessner: "*parce qu'en français c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style*"¹ - although absence of *style* must be seen as an ironic aim rather than an achievement. Another source reports Beckett's more deeply ironic response to repeated questioning on the subject: "*Pour faire remarquer moi*".² Raymond Federman has played down the importance of Beckett's French composition by pointing out that "since Beckett eventually reverts to English for the renditions of his French texts, one can only conclude that, whatever his reasons for turning to French, they are automatically cancelled

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1. Samuel Beckett, quoted by Richard Seaver (ed.), *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On*, New York, Grove Press Inc. (1976), pp. xxxv-xxxvi.
 2. Samuel Beckett, quoted in "Why Samuel Beckett Writes in French", *Books Abroad*, V. 23, Part 3 (Summer 1949), p. 248.

by the act of re-writing the works in English".³ For the purposes of this study, which deals with those translated and re-worked texts, the whole issue is interesting, rather than significant.

The second major shift in the narrative technique - the sustained use of first-person narration - has more profound consequences for this study. As we have seen, first-person narration is important, if sporadic, in Beckett's early fiction. Often the direct voice is parodic, mocking literary styles by assuming exaggerated versions of their conventions. This parody also takes the form of narrative postures, flamboyantly put on, by which the attitudes of raconteur, of didacticist or all-seeing story-teller are ridiculed in displays which are too ironically vivid for authenticity. This direct voice also draws attention to the deeper pretences and qualities of fiction, so that in *More Pricks than Kicks* we are forced to consider the distinction between textual time and reading time; in *Murphy* an address to the compositor reminds us that the text is, essentially, type-face; in *Watt* Sam's self-contradicting narration raises questions about narrative source and reliability, at the heart of which is the fictional - that is, made-up - nature of the text itself.

In "Assumption", the first fiction which Beckett saw published, he remarks that "the creative artist must be partly illusionist". The first person narrative voice reveals the other part of the creative artist, the maker who points out the artifice in the illusion he has created, or the maker who, working the wires of such an illusion, reveals *himself* as artificial. When the entire narrative structure is articulated by a "Devised deviser devising" (C 64) as the economical declension in Beckett's recent work *Company* describes him; and when this being orchestrates the narrative so that avowed problems of communication reveal the ambiguity of identity, desire and death; the potential for parody, self-parody and literary self-consciousness is high. This potential is suggested

3. Raymond Federman, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*, p. 15.

in *Mercier and Camier*, is developed in the stories, and is realized in the trilogy.

In *More Pricks than Kicks*, *Murphy* and *Watt* there is a tendency for the voice of the "I" speaker to dissolve in the surrounding narrative field, but in the trilogy and the stories which immediately precede it the deviser is magnified by continued proximity, a figure seen through a rigid fish-eye lens. His presence is central, his control overt, his diversions and entertainments lead back to himself.

Who is he? - a literary juggler, a lyricist of silence, immovably reminiscing about half-forgotten journeys, afraid and defiant. He has the qualities of those medieval troubadours whom E.K. Chambers describes:

To tramp long miles in wind and rain, to stand wet to the skin and hungry and footsore, making the slow bourgeois laugh while the heart was bitter within, such must have been the fate among the humbler minstrels at least. And at the end to die like a dog in a ditch, under the ban of the church and with the prospect of eternal damnation before the soul.⁴

The fiction which this bitter entertainer passes off as his own has a highly parodic content, in keeping with his scepticism toward comfortable bourgeois habits of thought and conventions of literature. Incidental targets are mimicked and mocked, literary affectations are parodied and - just as in the "I" interludes in *Watt* - self-contradiction shows up the narrator's artifice, unreliability or self-deception. These texts also use self-parody, which may emerge as the caricature of previous characters or which may take the form of derisive repetition of previous textual motifs and a general, pervasive air of parodic inauthenticity (familiar from *Watt*).

In *Watt* this wholesale parodic tone comes from an equally generalised sense of fraudulence. Words, things and people operate

4. E.K. Chambers, quoted by James K. Feibleman, *In Praise of Comedy: A Study in its Theory and Practice*, p. 41.

in ignorance of logic, convention and expectation. To some extent this is true of the trilogy and its immediate precursors. But the dissimulation of the narrators themselves causes the trilogy texts to seem exaggeratedly fabricated parodies of creative artifice. This is especially apparent when the narrator escapes from self-definition into fantasy. Such tales - ironically enough, related by the spokesman of *The Unnamable*, at least, to "put off the hour when I must speak of me" (U 279) - constitute a simultaneous side-stepping of, and implicit discourse on, their creator's situation. These inner stories often contradict their creator's statements about his artistic objectives and his definitions of himself. Because the reader of the trilogy confronts the most vital issues which the text raises through a composite of contradictory impressions and statements, so that many remarks must be weighed against later comments on the same subject and a judgement made as to where the irony lies, the entire text assumes a quality of elaborate pretence. Since pretending - on a less ironic scale - is basic to fiction itself, this heightened fabrication turns the narrators into parodies of crafty authors. First-person narration is essential if this parodic quality is to be more than passing literary self-consciousness, and texts which are the subject of much of this chapter constitute Beckett's first ventures into sustained first-person narration.

A quality of conscious inauthenticity (which goes with parody) is enhanced by the tendency, among the trilogy narrators, to resemble or identify with one another. Molloy and Moran hold so much in common that they may be considered alternative fictional presentations of one individual, and the similarities between this divided character and Malone of *Malone Dies* suggest that Molloy/Moran is a fictional creation of Malone's, or that Malone is the same character at a later stage of development. Moran explicitly discusses previous characters, inferring that they are products of his own imagination:

Oh the stories I could tell you if I were easy.
 What a rabble in my head, what a gallery of
 moribunds. Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier and all
 the others. I would never have believed that -
 yes, I believe it willingly. Stories, stories.
 I have not been able to tell them. I shall not
 be able to tell this one. (*Mo* 126)

At the same time, he derides his narrative capability. This succession of narrators, each seeming to claim the previous narrator as his character, points on to infinity. The narrator of *The Unnamable*, who also claims preceding texts as his own, suggests that he himself is the fiction of a further informing intelligence:

... he thinks he's caught me, he feels me in him,
 then he says I, as if I were he ... then he says
 Murphy, or Malone, I forget, as if I were Malone,
 but their day is done ... it is always he who
 speaks. Mercier never spoke, Moran never spoke.
 I never spoke, I seem to speak, that's because he
 says I as if he were I. (*U* 371)

The composite nature of narrative identity diminishes individual integrity. At the same time, Beckett gives fictional projection to the view that:

the individual is a succession of individuals; the
 world being a projection of the individual's
 consciousness (an objectification of the individual's
 will, Schopenhauer would say), the pact must be
 continually renewed, the letter of safe-conduct
 brought up to date. (*P* 8)

Beckett's terms, however, do not suggest the positive flux of regeneration ("continually renewed") but external threat, solipsism and a confusion of identity.

Absolute identification between narrator and author can never be assumed and even in frank autobiography the existence of a narrative *persona*, distinct from the individual who has experienced

the events in the text, may be inferred from the way in which omissions are inevitable, and weighted interpretations likely. Yet in such texts there is a tacit understanding that the reader enters into the spirit of things by believing that the "I" speaker experienced events exactly as he is describing them. This sense of dealing directly with a participant in the action is what gives first-person narration its strength and immediacy. Beckett uses this convention. Then, by later denying the authenticity of his narrator, he exposes the falsehood behind the convention: in first-person texts we believe the narrator but in fact we are dealing with potent fabrications. So in the trilogy the narrator who is our point of contact is shown up as a pretext, a mask or disguise for an anonymous identity who, as the narrator of *The Unnamable* points out, is lying when he says "I". This emphatic falsity of narrators is so overt that it leads to parody: an exaggerated, mocking imitation of the condition of every text which is narrated in the first-person. There is a further dimension to this parody: when narrators whom we have accepted in good faith are revealed, in later texts, as pseudo-narrators, the implication is that texts are entirely unreliable. This then contributes to the general ambience of uncertainty in these texts.

This non-narrator is like an inner mask conscious of its position behind outer, fabricated faces. The emblem of this narrative inauthenticity in Beckett's fiction is the parrot, an insensible repeater of the language of another. *The Unnamable* narrator actually calls himself a parrot (U 308). The narrator of the post-trilogy work, "Texts for Nothing", goes almost as far, interrupting his ironic evasion of self-definition: "What a blessing I'm not talking of myself" with self-castigation: "enough vile parrot I'll kill you" (NK 37). The description of a cockatoo in *Mercier and Camier* predicts the situation of narrators in later texts:

It clung shakily to its perch hung from a corner of the ceiling ... dizzily rocked by conflicting swing and spin. ... Feebly and fitfully its breast rose

and fell, faint quiverings ruffled up the down at every expiration. Every now and then the beak would gape and for what seemed whole seconds fishlike remain agape. Then the black spindle of the tongue was seen to stir. The eyes, averted from the light, filled with unspeakable bewilderment and distress, seemed all ears. Shivers of anguish rippled the plumage, blazing in ironic splendour. (MC 27).

This parrot, swinging nauseatingly about, equipped with exaggerated apparatus for perception, silent (except, as Mercier observes, for nocturnal groans) but with a black tongue visible, could represent any one of the Beckett narrators at that unknowable point before articulation begins. Molloy describes a vocal parrot which has a profane repertoire: perhaps originally the possession of a French sailor, it cries "Putain de merde!", and its other phrase, "Fuck the son of a bitch", suggests American ownership. At the time of which Molloy writes, its mistress, an old lady, is having no success with "Pretty Polly!" (Mo 36). In the same location, Molloy feels that he is in "a cage out of time" (Mo 48), which suggests an unconscious identification with the bird. The way in which the parrot will repeat curses rather than platitudes strengthens the association between it and the narrator. Also, like the narrator of *Molloy*, which was first composed in French, then translated into English, the parrot is bilingual. Malone, too, recalls a parrot with which he identifies, imagining himself in its cluttered cage - "personally I would have felt cramped" (MD 200). This parrot is also an imperfect pupil, insisting on the emptiness of the intellect when its owner tries to make it repeat "*Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*" - a belief held by Aristotle, St. Thomas and Locke.⁵ As Hugh Kenner has pointed out, this is "a doctrine it would have travestied whenever it opened its beak".⁶ At the heart of the parrot paradigm is the way in which the fictional first-person narrator is necessarily constrained in terms of freedom and originality. Beckett's narrators are either implicitly

5. V.J. McGill, in Dagobert D. Runes, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 210.

6. Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: a Critical Study*, London, John Calder (1962), p. 131.

or directly conscious of the limitations under which the "vice-exister" (*U* 289) operates and they are aware of their parrot-like obedience, flamboyance and ridiculousness. Above all they know that they are inauthentic.

If the ancestor of the trilogy narrator is the "I" of *More Pricks than Kicks*, *Murphy* and *Watt*, his genetic material lies in *Mercier and Camier*; "The Expelled", "The Calmative", "The End"; and *First Love*. An intricate and twisted structure of parallels and cross-linkages lies within these texts. But this duplication and cross-reference is seldom without ironic overtones, and an examination of parody in these works, especially the kind of parody which results from such consciously distorted echoes, will also indicate the parodic subjects and structures inherited by the trilogy.

Mercier and Camier

The narrator of *Mercier and Camier* begins his tale by claiming the companionship of his characters: "The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was with them all the time" (*MC* 7). He means this, however, only in the most conventional way (in which all omniscient narrators are with their characters) for he takes direct part in the narrative on the most formal level, seldom intruding (especially compared to the "I" voice of Beckett's later texts). So he tells us less about himself than - say - Sam, of *Watt*. But his nature can be inferred from a conversation between his characters, Mercier and Camier:

Strange impression, said Mercier, strange impression
sometimes that we are not alone. You not?

I am not sure I understand, said Camier...

Like the presence of a third party, said Mercier.
Enveloping us. I have felt it from the start. And
I am anything but psychic. (*MC* 100)

This exchange takes place in the open countryside as the couple walk between towns. The allusion is Biblical: Mercier and Camier

are made to experience the events described in Luke 24, when two disciples, sadly discussing the crucifixion of their leader as they walk along the road to Emmaus, are joined by another traveller whom they do not recognise as the resurrected Christ. Mercier and Camier, appropriately sceptical, make incongruous disciples. In their case, the presence must be that of the narrator, not quite visible, not quite of their world, the ubiquity of whom the reader (but not the characters) is conscious. Like Watt and the later character Molloy, the narrator of *Mercier and Camier* is a Christ-figure. The specific allusion which establishes the connection identifies him as resurrected (perhaps from previous Beckett texts) and disguised (like Jesus on the road to Emmaus). These properties suit him, for his knowledge of other Beckett texts - which is revealed through his pointed introduction of their characters (such as Watt, Mr Gall, Mr Graves, the kind donkey owner of "The End" as well as the narrator of "The End", with his distinctive begging board) events (Mercier and Camier hear the mixed choir of *Watt*) and techniques (such as the use of parodic forms) suggest identification with other Beckett narrators.

This affinity is displayed in the use of those parodic forms which commonly occur in Beckett's previous fiction: caricature, travesty of theology, an exaggeratedly precise approach to giving information, incidental parody which stimulates speculation about non-literary language, and the mockery of literary conventions. However, the association between the narrator of *Mercier and Camier* and the creators of other Beckett texts results in a new kind of self-parody: the caricature of people who are familiar from these previous texts. Raymond Federman points out the significance of this innovation, claiming that from *Mercier and Camier* on, Beckett "parodies his own creative efforts and, rather than exploit reality directly, he builds each successive novel on the content and structure of his previous achievements".⁷

7. Raymond Federman, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*, p. 160.

Extravagant caricature of personality types is a comic standby in Beckett's early and mature fiction. In *Mercier and Camier*, for instance, a hypocritically upright war veteran threatens the main characters before revealing a weakness for bribery. The derisive portrait of this old soldier, aglow with medals, ostentatiously nursing his old wounds, slips into a parody of medical jargon:

... he had risked his life without success in defence of a territory which in itself must have left him cold and considered as a symbol cannot have greatly heated him either. He carried a stick at once elegant and massive and even leaned on it from time to time. He suffered torment with his hip, the pain shot down his buttock and up his rectum deep into the bowels and even as far north as the pyloric valve, culminating as a matter of course in uretro-scrotal spasms with quasi-incessant longing to micturate. (MC 13-14)

This victim of nationalism and pelvic pain attempts to play God to the Adam and Eve provided by a pair of jammed copulating dogs: "He has driven them from the shelter, said Camier, there is no denying that, but by no means from the garden" (MC 15).

As in *Watt*, parodic exactness in *Mercier and Camier* is intended to be self-defeating, revealing fabrication or fallibility. After a description of Mercier and Camier continually missing each other at a pre-arranged meeting, a numerical table appears, setting out, with mock-precision, their exact times of arrival and departure. This table is introduced, with absolute self-contradiction, with the comment "In other words". It is concluded, and nullified, with a remark which destroys its plausibility: "What stink of artifice" (MC 9). With similar mock-precision, brisk lists summarise the conclusions of Mercier and Camier's conversations. These lists, however, reveal the murkiness of the subjects which they ostensibly clarify: such conversations, far from adding to the characters' information or resolution, dissolve in nonsense and indecision. Ironically deficient lists have a precedent in Beckett's fiction: the *Murphy* narrator supplies a list of Celia's measurements which

seems to suggest that a character is no more than a cluster of physical attributes. In *Mercier and Camier* this technique is refined and repeated, as summaries of chapters, grouped in pairs, occur throughout the text. By providing the content of the work in such unsatisfying shape, these inventories ironically highlight the importance of narrative form in fiction.

Beckett's prose is - as we have seen - often preoccupied with the way words work. In *Watt* the artificial nature of the relationship between words and the objects to which they are conventionally ascribed is exposed. In *Mercier and Camier* dialogue misses its mark so regularly that the spoken word is shown to be inadequate to the task of communication. Even the simplest conversation is open to confusion:

After a moment of silence Camier said:
 Let us sit down, I feel all sucked off.
 You mean sit down, said Mercier.
 I mean sit us down, said Camier.
 Then let us sit down, said Mercier. (MC 12)

One word is enough to obscure meaning and foster dissent. David Daiches, writing about the humour which results from misunderstandings, comments on the nature and consequences of the problem of conversational language:

The signals we send out from our own personal centres of thought and feeling are inevitably misunderstood by the recipient, who reads them in the light of his own thoughts and feelings and so adapts them to his own needs, getting them wrong. On this view, loneliness is part of the human condition and the possibilities of true communication are few and precious.⁸

In the following passage from *Mercier and Camier* a conventional conversation pattern is parodically reproduced:

8. David Daiches, "Misunderstanding as Humour", *More Literary Essays*, London, Oliver and Boyd (1968), p. 20.

Mr Conaire stepped back and struck an attitude.
 What age would you say I was? he said. He rotated slowly.
 Speak up, he said, don't spare me.
 Mr Gast named a figure.
 Damnation, said Mr Conaire, got it in one.
 Tis the baldness is deceptive, said Mr Gast. (MC 51)

Mr Gast guesses correctly, but continues to speak as if he had over-estimated Mr Conaire's age. Therefore his last comment, meaningless in itself, reveals the formulaic nature of the exchange. Because the formula is faithfully imitated, with the exception of one significant distortion, the conversation becomes a parody of such established verbal exchanges. Through comic and parodic dialogue, Beckett gives the impression that communication is fragile and meaning is easily jeopardised.

Mercier and Camier can be read as a mock-epic,⁹ a travesty of the ancient literary tradition in which heroes journey forth from safety, triumphing over danger and evil. This is established in the introduction, where the quest motif is evoked and contradicted:

Physically it was fairly easy going, without seas or frontiers to be crossed, through regions untormented on the whole, if desolate in parts. ... They did not have to face, with greater or less success, outlandish ways, tongues, laws, skies, foods, in surroundings little resembling those to which first childhood, then boyhood, then manhood had inured them. (MC 7)

Mercier and Camier speak, to some extent, in the genteel language of endeavour and idealism. They are travellers who are "not faring for the love of faring" (MC 67). Camier looks for a "token" of truth and calls an agreement a "covenant" (MC 60-61). They form an "heroic resolution" (MC 42). One of the few direct literary references in the book is to Homer. The classical allusion is reinforced by the name Helen, given to the woman who shelters them. Camier reminisces heroically about the siege of Mafeking:

9. See Eric Levy, *Beckett and the Voice of Species*, Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1980.

We died like flies. Of hunger. Of cold. Of thirst.
 Of heat. Pom! Pom! The last rounds. Surrender!
 Never! We eat our dead. Drink our pee. Pom! Pom!
 Two more we didn't know we had. But what is that we
 hear? A clamour from the watch-tower! Dust on the
 horizon! The column at last! Our tongues are black.
 Hurrah none the less. Rah! Rah! A craking as of
 crows. A quartermaster dies of joy. We are saved.
 The century was two months old. (MC 74-75)

Camier's lively re-enactment is too histrionic for authenticity - he is parodying the stance adopted by tellers of war-stories. Similarly, the connections between Mercier and Camier and the epic hero are extremely ironic. Their polite language co-exists with dishonesty or acute brutality. Camier, changing his tack in mid-lie, declares "a truce to dissembling" (MC 16). A policeman, whose skull they fracture, is addressed as "worthy constable" (MC 91). Behind their quest lies a clichéd pretext: Camier, a private detective, has to go and see a man about a dog. When joined by Watt, their gallant company looks - as another policeman suggests - like a circus routine. As performers of this kind, they conform to Walter Kerr's description of the function of comic gangs:

A clown too much on his own comes to seem merely mad ... tag-along friends are not simply confidants, as they might be in tragedy; they are counter-clowns, boobs of a feather, living proof that human ineptitude is not exceptional and universal.¹⁰

The epic is not the only literary genre parodied in *Mercier and Camier*. Mr Madden, a fellow train traveller, regales the couple with his life story in a way which parodies the *roman-à-clef*. Like Mr Micks in *Watt*, he uses the self-censorship which was conventional among narrators in the previous century: "I was born at P---" (MC 37). In this context - as in Mr Micks' speech - the convention is absurd, since both Madden and Micks are telling their stories aloud, so the effect of the dash standing in for the remainder of the place-name is inevitably lost. Mr Madden offers self-analysis

¹⁰. Walter Kerr, *Tragedy and Comedy*, p. 177.

so damning and pompous that the expectation that the autobiographical narrator will take stock of himself is ridiculed: "Here lies no doubt the explanation of my unconfiding character and general surliness" (MC 37). Moreover, this tale inverts the assumption that autobiography will be edifying by illustrating, through the achievements of one individual, the achievements which are possible for all. The features of the life which Mr Madden describes are violence, killing, arson and joyless fornication. His manner, however, is as self-righteous as a nineteenth-century missionary. A final allusion completes this parody of the autobiographical narrator: Mr Madden, whose nose is degenerating, confides that "People love you less when your snout starts to crumble" (MC 40). This can only be a reference to that more appealing, and more consciously ironic autobiographer, Sterne's Tristram Shandy, whose nose, crushed at birth, provides the subject of much wry discussion in his tale.

Pastoral conventions are also vehemently and comically overturned in *Mercier and Camier*:

It was true countryside at last, quickset hedgerows, mud, liquid manure, rocks, wallows, cowshit, hovels, and here and there a form unmistakably human scratching at his plot since the first scabs of dawn, or shifting his dung, with a spade, having lost his shovel and his fork being broken. (MC 106)

This is such a jaundiced description of rural life that it brings its obverse - pastoral idealisation - to mind. A comparable parody of panoramic description occurs at the beginning of Chapter Seven. An Irish coastal landscape is described, complete with sea, ruined fortifications, moor, pastures, mountains and a road, which "cuts across wet turfbogs, a thousand feet above sea-level, two thousand if you prefer" (MC 97). This last sentence, in which geographical

measurements double as the result of mock-deference to an imagined opinion, emphasises the fabricated nature of the prose. It slips into an exaggerated parodic version of landscape description, including the clichés of the genre:

In the west the chain is at its highest, its peaks exalt even the most downcast eyes, peaks commanding the vast champaign land, the celebrated pastures, the golden vale. (MC 97)

This overstated lyricism, with its conventional assumption that beautiful scenery has an uplifting emotional effect on its viewers, is abruptly overturned as the narrator switches his tone from encomium to invective. The human element is introduced with comic and unexpected venom: "None ever pass this way but beauty-spot hogs and fanatical trampers" (MC 97). So this parody works through exaggerated mimicry and contrast, to mock the conventions of landscape description. Beckett's refusal to be sentimental about the countryside and its inhabitants, including rural workers, and his disdain for literature which perpetrates such sentimentality, is apparent from his earlier fiction. *Mercier and Camier* continues the exposure of the falsity of pastoral idealisation.

The previous chapter detailed Beckett's emerging tendency to establish links between his prose works, so that transformed but identifiable elements of *Murphy* appear in *Watt*. This technique is amplified and extended in *Mercier and Camier* and successive fiction. Mercier and Camier overhear, in a bar, the name of Quin, Smeraldina's lover and Belacqua's best man in *More Pricks than Kicks*. Camier, with ironic truthfulness, points out that "that must be someone who does not exist" (MC 119). In *Mercier and Camier* Mr Gall - the name of Rosie Dew's patron in *Murphy* and the piano tuners in *Watt* - is reincarnated as the unctious manager of a country pub. One of his customers is Mr Graves, now speaking like a "pastoral patriarch" (MC 47) - which is quite a promotion from the position of gardener in *Watt*. Watt himself appears to Mercier and Camier. Articulate and authoritative, he calls them "my children" (MC 111), in the

manner of a priest. Mercier recalls a Murphy who resembles Watt, but his description of the circumstances of Murphy's death is (compared to the character in *Murphy*) slightly wrong, as if Mercier's information were based on rumour about a remote acquaintance. The cross-textual connections are not only retrospective. Watt, adopting mock-biblical language, prophesies that "one is born of us, who having nothing will wish for nothing, except to be left the nothing he hath" (MC 114). This description fits all the trilogy narrators. Watt's speech parodies John the Baptist's revelation that he is the forerunner of a holy man greater than himself (Matthew 3:11). Watt is violent and antagonistic and his ecclesiastical attributes are all as parodic as the heroic postures of Mercier and Camier. The most significant feature of such character repetition is its distortion. Mr Gall and Mr Graves are quite different from their counterparts in *Watt*. Watt himself, as he points out, is unrecognisable. The name is all that connects the broken mutterer of *Watt* with his fierce and resourceful manifestation in *Mercier and Camier*. This similarity and change results in a kind of caricature. By giving characters in different texts the same names, Beckett makes contrast and comparison inevitable, usually with mocking effect. A name shared by the mysterious servant of abstract art in *Watt* and the practical innkeeper in *Mercier and Camier* ensures that a chronological reading brings *Watt*'s Mr Gall down to earth. The contrast between Mr Graves in *Watt* and Mr Graves in *Mercier and Camier* works the other way. Watt himself appears as two personality extremes: passive and naive in *Watt*, and a cursing organiser in *Mercier and Camier*. The contrast between these extremes makes it difficult to take either seriously. There are other dimensions to this character repetition. It involves artistic reincarnation, and like the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, it raises questions about the nature of identity. What is retained of the self in successive lives? Is the aptly-named Mr Graves the same character in both texts, but altered, in line with the argument about exfoliation and renewal of personality which Beckett (as we saw earlier) advanced in *Proust*? If so, does identity reside in names, so that the only connection between self

and past is a linguistic convention? These questions are implicitly posited by Beckett's technique of character repetition. What is clear is that such a technique makes characters seem more like puppets at the disposal of an animating narrator than like representations of people.

Mercier and Camier has strong similarities with Beckett's previous texts. As in *More Pricks than Kicks* ornate prose appears, so anachronistically convoluted that it could parody the mellifluous voice of the Master of Ceremonies in a Victorian Music Hall: Mercier and Camier, walking, are said to have "resumed that indescribable process not unconnected with their legs" (MC 88). Drawing attention to the limitations of language ("indescribable"), this also flourishes the ornate possibilities of language. As in *Murphy*, misplaced literalism points up the inauthenticity of accepted literary phrases: "The ranger's head appeared in the doorway. Believe it or not, only his head was to be seen" (MC 18). This includes a mischievous play on narrative plausibility ("believe it or not"). In both *Murphy* and *Mercier and Camier* humour, a by-product of the text, is also its subject: Mercier gloomily discusses the function of laughter. The parodic theological speculation of Mr Spiro in *Watt* is echoed, in *Mercier and Camier*, in a debate about the ecclesiastical position on artificial insemination which Camier overhears in a bar and, with mock-piety, puts an end to. Later texts are also anticipated in *Mercier and Camier*. Mercier describes how "fire and water invade my thoughts" (MC 87), a condition which Molloy will also experience. The narrator writes of "the mind flayed alive" (MD 108) as though the intellect (he uses "mind", not "brain") is protected by a vulnerable but normally impermeable skin. The image is also used to describe Malone's character, Lemuel. The bicycle which Mercier and Camier possess, but do not use, is the prototype for that machine which Molloy remembers so wistfully. But the most important connection between *Mercier and Camier* and its fellow Beckett texts is the pervasive consciousness of identity as fictional, which is so significant in the later, first-personal texts.

Stories

"The Expelled", "The Calmative" and "The End" are three confessions, or reminiscences, on the subject of shelter and exposure. "The Expelled" narrator tells the story of his (possibly) punitive ejection from his dead father's house, his staggering progression through a crowded city, his refuge in a hackney-cab and his escape from this retreat. Comparable events are related in "The Calmative" - in which a decaying individual describes his wanderings in a strange city, among strangers incomprehensible to him. At one point he hides in a cathedral, explicitly recalling the medieval custom which allowed criminals to take advantage of ecclesiastical sanctuary. However he leaves this refuge. In "The End" the narrator, cast out of his asylum home, tells of a restless progression of shelters enjoyed and rejected, of safety and danger, culminating in the fantasy of a last refuge alone, in the belly of a small boat which he gladly casts out and sinks, all hands on board. The events in the stories differ, but the central obsession is the same and this, with Beckett's comment that "they can be taken as three phases of one existence",¹¹ identifies the narrator as the same personality, giving alternative perspectives on the dilemma of longing for and revulsion from refuge. This problem of shelter and exposure involves the form, as well as the content, of the stories. In these initial first-personal texts, just as in the mature soliloquies of the trilogy, the narrator shelters behind literary conventions of plausibility and accuracy, only to expose them as fraudulent. The resulting exaggerated literary artifice parodies the act of literary creation itself. This conflict between illusion and disclosure, between hiding and laying oneself open, can only be resolved, as the suicide fantasy of "The End" narrator suggests, by annihilating all components, by submerging refuge and refugee in the formless obscurity of dark water.

11. Samuel Beckett, quoted by John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 102.

"The Expelled" begins with such overstated, fastidious self-qualification that it mocks the convention of authorial precision. For example, the narrator begins to tell how he was bodily flung from his father's house by trying to accurately calculate and convey the number of steps between the door and the gutter:

I arrived therefore at three totally different figures, without ever knowing which of them was right. And when I say that the figure has gone from my mind, I mean that none of the three figures is with me any more, in my mind. It is true that if I were to find, in my mind, where it certainly is to be found, one of these figures, I would find it and it alone, without being able to deduce from it the other two. No, I would have to find all three, in my mind, in order to know all three. (NK 9)

This calculation is in accord with the accepted narrative practice of supplying selected details for the sake of plausibility. Yet it is wildly inappropriate to the tale of loss and rejection which it introduces. So it is a parody of authorial exactness. It is dismissed, later, with "After all, it is not the number of steps that matters" (NK 10), which emphasises the inauthenticity of its original prominence.

The successive paragraph contains further parody on the subject of creativity, with the description of the improbable imaginative experience of the ejected narrator:

... the sound, fainter but unmistakable, of the door slammed again, roused me from my reverie, in which already a whole landscape was taking form, charming with hawthorn and wild roses, most dreamlike, and made me look up in alarm, my hands flat on the sidewalk and my legs braced for flight. (NK 10)

The suggestion that his imagination can overwhelm such a traumatic experience and such an uncomfortable position is clearly intended to be ironic, and the purpose of this irony is to parody the notion of the transcendent imagination.

These two parodies are the work of a consciously dissimulating story-teller, who warns us that in the past, at least, he "still knew how to act" (NK 13) and whose fiction both pretends and uncovers pretences. For example, a vivid description of the door of the house from which he was evicted is enclosed in comments - "How to describe it? ... So much for that description" (NK 12)-which establish the fictional status of an otherwise convincing reminiscence. At times an ostentatiously autobiographical voice, akin to that of Mr Madden in *Mercier and Camier*, mocks the self-analytic mode: "I became sour and mistrustful, a little before my time, in love with hiding and the prone position" (NK 14). This comment recalls, and exposes, its obverse - the tendency to self-congratulation on the part of the autobiographical narrator.

Parody in "The Expelled" is not limited to purely literary matters. A parodically sentimental attitude is struck, then dropped, when the narrator, having received an inheritance, offers a reason why an unremembered woman should leave him money: "Perhaps she had dandled me on her knees while I was still in swaddling clothes and there had been some lovey-dovey. Sometimes that suffices. I repeat, in swaddling clothes, for any later it would have been too late, for lovey-dovey" (NK 19).

"The Expelled" continues the process of textual interpenetration which was established in *Mercier and Camier* where Watt is caricatured and Murphy is mentioned. Like Watt, the narrator of "The Expelled" has a comically non-conformist walk:

I set off. What a gait. Stiffness of the lower limbs, as if nature had denied me knees, extraordinary splaying of the feet to right and left of the line of march. The trunk, on the contrary, as if by the effect of a compensatory mechanism, was as flabby as an old ragbag, tossing wildly to the unpredictable jolts of the pelvis. (NK 13)

This walk has its origins in childhood incontinence and (as is explained at length) every feature of it is calculated to fulfil some requirement for personal comfort, or to provide a rationale for curious observers. As in *Watt*, the chief effect is comic. These walks could serve as illustrations of Bergson's hypothesis that mechanical or inflexible movement is always funny, because of the gap between its rigidity and our expectation of suppleness. As in *Watt*, this mechanical quality associates its victim with marionettes, so that he seems inhuman, manipulated from beyond. Characterisation through movement, in "The Expelled", also suggests deprivation ("as if nature had denied me knees") and a certain capricious violence on the part of the body against itself ("tossing wildly to the unpredictable jolts of the pelvis"). However bizarre his walk may appear, it is an extension and illustration of the contradiction and misfortunes of his life.

"The Expelled" is full of other echoes and anticipations of Beckett's other work. A policeman is as territorial about the footpath as the one in *Mercier and Camier*, as incomprehensibly authoritative as the one in *Molloy*. Like Mr Madden in *Mercier and Camier*, the narrator of "The Expelled" has a taste for arson. The failure of verbal communication arises again, as the cabbie and his passenger "did our best, both of us, to understand, to explain" (NK 20). Their success is limited. The Christ-like quality common to Beckett's narrators, from *Mercier and Camier* on, appears in "The Expelled" as the narrator's bogus birth through a stable window (the manger in the stable is mentioned and it is unoccupied): "I went out head first, my hands were flat on the ground of the yard while my legs were still thrashing to get clear of the frame. I remember the tufts of grass on which I pulled with both hands, in my effort to extricate myself" (NK 24). His hallucination of his own corpse, carried from the house, is also experienced by Malone in the trilogy. Like Malone, "The Expelled" narrator affects emotional tepidity: "I don't know why I told this story. I could just as well have told another. Perhaps some other time I'll be able to tell

another. Living souls, you will see how alike they are" (NK 24). In both texts this affected detachment contrasts with the painstaking literary self-consciousness and the sensational material of the actual narrative. Another similarity between the narrator of "The Expelled" and the trilogy narrators is the anonymity which he shares with *The Unnamable* narrator. These repetitions and foreshadowings illustrate the increasing tendency of Beckett's fiction to take itself as its own subject. For all its similarities with earlier texts, the variation in narrative point of view sets "The Expelled" apart from its predecessors. The "I" voice allows Beckett to create an illusion of genuine reminiscence, which contrasts meaningfully with the obvious fictional nature of the text: its flagrant contrivances, its improbable revelations.

"The Calmative" is more intensely, but no more reliably autobiographical than "The Expelled". The intensity partly derives from the narrator's graphic and gruesome description of his writing conditions and motives: the narrative is intended to divert his attention from his body, which is dying. He writes in bed, waiting for "the great red lapses of the heart, the tearings at the caecal walls ... the slow killings to finish in my skull, the assaults on unshakable pillars, the fornications with corpses" (NK 25). The story is a self-administered tranquillizer, a calmative.

The illusion of spontaneous composition is sustained throughout by devices such as internal revision: "the houses were full of people, besieged, no, I don't know" (NK 41), and internal planning. This planning may combine with literary self-analysis: he will tell his story in the past, he says, "as though it were a myth, or an old fable" (NK 26). Some distance from the end he decides that the tale must finish with conclusive regret and decisive loss: "it must cease gently, as gently cease on the stairs the steps of the loved one, who could not love and will not come back, and whose steps say so, that she could not love and will not come back" (NK 39).

The way in which he uses a brief self-contained description of unrequited love to illustrate the effect he wants from his conclusion suggests how deeply fictional his narrative is and the extent to which he is an author, as opposed to a raconteur.

Yet despite the implication of narrative honesty conferred by the writer's plausible motive and progressive self-correction, analysis and planning, he is not reliable and the tale is not the genuine recollection of past events which the "I" voice seems to suggest. For a start, the first sentence: "I don't know when I died" (NK 25) cannot be true. It must be wish-fulfilment - the dying utterance of one who, afraid of impending death, situates it in the past tense as if it were an event already distant and overcome. But whatever the reasons, this diminishes his credibility from the very beginning of the tale. Moreover, he warns us that his story will be a "myth" or "fable" and these are both genres which have no claim to naturalistic narration. "Myth", at least, may be a synonym for falsehood. As well as these contrasts to the autobiographical stance, the narrator shows his awareness that he exists only as a narrator. That is, that he and his story do not derive from the world external to fiction. He reveals the fictional nature of his identity in a death-fantasy:

... my body ... this old body to which nothing ever happened, or so little, which never met with anything, wished for anything, in its tarnished universe, except for the mirrors to shatter, the plane, the curved, the magnifying, the minifying, and to vanish in the havoc of its images. (NK 27)

With the disappearance of distorted *images* of identity, the identity itself will (the narrator hopes) vanish. In other words, the annihilation of the reflective surface of narrative, for which his mirrors are a metaphor, is bound up with the annihilation of his own identity. This strongly suggests that the creating self only has existence insofar as it is represented in its own creations. But reflections falsify and narration implies the distortion of

inaccurate reflection. The self, therefore, is grotesquely misrepresented in the surface of the text and this surface is the only medium in which it is possible for narrative identity to take shape. This is Beckett's first expression of a fantasy in which simultaneous annihilation of both narrative and the creating self takes place. Such an annihilation is keenly anticipated by later narrators.

In keeping with the literary self-consciousness of the narrator, sections of "The Calmative" parody literary models. The first, a mock-quotation of his childhood bedtime story, briefly adopts a *Boys Own Annual* style:

it was the adventures of one Joe Breem, or Breen, the son of a lighthouse keeper, a strong muscular lad of fifteen, those were the words, who swam for miles in the night, a knife between his teeth, after a shark, I forget why, out of sheer heroism (NK 28).

So a fearful boy is lulled to sleep by a story about an impossibly courageous boy - a contrast between character (Joe Breem) and reader (the narrator of "The Calmative") which says much about the distance between fiction and reality.

As we have seen, "The Calmative" narrator's purported reminiscence already has parodic overtones of inauthenticity. When he describes the experience of meeting the smug and aggressive narrator of a very different kind of autobiography, the effect is telescopic (as "I" voice reports the substance of another "I" voice's speech) and deeply ironic:

tell me the story of your life. ... He jogged me in the ribs. No details, he said, the main drift, the main drift. But as I remained silent he said, Shall I tell you mine, then you'll see what I mean. The account he then gave was brief and dense, facts, without comment. That's what I call a life, he said, do you follow me now? It wasn't bad, his story, positively fairy-like in places. (NK 37-38)

The speaker is a caricature of the factual and informative, non-ironic autobiographer. His instructive approach parodies the didacticism within autobiographies of the great or successful, which often implicitly encourage the reader to emulate the behaviour of their subject. This instruction also has an ironic effect as our story-teller, whose entire identity is bound up with his narration, submits, with mock-naivety, to being taught his own *raison d'être*. But this ignorance is very much assumed: when the narrator calls his companion's "brief and dense" revelation "fairy-like", he is labelling even the most factual autobiography as fictional, which reveals an opinion about the workings of first-person narration.

A parody of fixed conversational phrases recalls the exchange between Mr Conaire and Mr Gast in *Mercier and Camier*. Brooding by the quay, the narrator meets a goat-boy who gives him a sweet. To his deep remorse, the narrator's opening line is "Where are you off to, my little man, with your nanny?" (NK 31). He does ~~not~~ get a second chance, but if he had, it would have been no better: "What does your daddy do?" (NK 32). These utterly worthless clichés contrast so effectively with his genuine intention to communicate that the irresistibly formulaic nature of conversation with strangers, and the inadequacy of such formulas, is revealed.

The opportunity to caricature the city's commuting consumers is not lost: "... the shops were shut. But the lights were on in their windows with the object no doubt of attracting customers and prompting them to say, I say, I like that, not dear either, I'll come back tomorrow, if I'm still alive" (NK 29). In sharp contrast to the voice of the casual shopper, the narrator's urgent and fearful expectation of death intrudes. The mock-quotation which blends, unpunctuated, into the surrounding narrative is a technique which becomes extremely significant in later texts, where the narrator's voice flows almost imperceptibly into stories which grow progressively more parodic.

The now familiar continuity between Beckett's texts is sustained in "The Calmative". The Christian reference occurs when he enters the city by the Shepherd's Gate, observing bats above, like flying crucifixions. As with so much of Beckett's Biblical imagery, the allusion is incongruous - the good shepherd is not conspicuous among his city flock, and bats are more commonly associated with sorcery than with Christianity. The narrator's posture of humility: "my hands twined together, my head bowed" (NK 26) will be duplicated by Molloy, squirming with mock-gratitude before the various helpers in his city. Like Molloy, he moves in "a wide semicircle" (NK 35) and Molloy's beloved bicycle is anticipated through the description of an enviable cyclist in "The Calmative". And while on the subject of locomotion, his gait concisely describes that of Watt and "The Expelled" narrator, appearing "at every step to solve a stato-dynamic problem never posed before" (NK 40). His situation - bed-ridden, dying and writing - is repeated in *Malone Dies*. However, the most significant cross-textual references in "The Calmative" are to *The Unnamable*. The narrator of *The Unnamable* tries to use his stories to give himself confidence in his own existence. "The Calmative" narrator also tries to use his own characters to restore his faith in himself. This is of course circular and futile. One of the objects of *The Unnamable* narrator's discourse is cessation of discourse, a paradox which "The Calmative" narrator voices with the comment: "All I say cancels out, I'll have said nothing" (NK 26). His contradictions and contrasts, many of which, as we have seen, result in parody, are part of this self-cancelling intention.

"The End" is another highly parodic and inauthentic narrative, the autobiography of one who calls his life-story "my myth" (NK 65). Like his other selves: the narrators of "The Expelled" and "The Calmative", he uses distorted Christian motifs and death imagery to describe an articulate wanderer. But this identity, this "mask of dirty old hairy leather" (NK 57) which he sinks with his invented boat is not necessarily himself. He is an actor; like the narrator of "The Expelled", and like "The Calmative" narrator, he tends toward self-cancellation: "assimilating the vowels and omitting the consonants" (NK 49). His tale, also like "The Expelled" and "The Calmative", advances, then withholds the autobiographical illusion of genuine experience lived and reported.

One of the events which are described during this mock-autobiography is a parody of the formulaic cant of the political evangelist:

One day I witnesses a strange scene ... It was a man perched on the roof of a car and haranguing the passers-by. That at least was my interpretation. He was bellowing so loud that snatches of his discourse reached my ears. Union ... brothers ... Marx ... capital ... bread and butter ... love. It was all Greek to me. The car was drawn up against the kerb, just in front of me, I saw the orator from behind. All of a sudden he turned and pointed at me, as at an exhibit. Look at this down and out, he vociferated, this leftover. If he doesn't go down on all fours, its for fear of being impounded. Old, lousy, rotten, ripe for the muck-heap. And there are a thousand like him, worse than him, ten thousand, twenty thousand - . A voice, Thirty thousand. Every day you pass them by, resumed the orator, and when you have backed a winner you fling them a farthing. Do you ever think? The voice, God forbid. A penny, resumed the orator, tuppence - . The voice, thruppence. It never enters your head, resumed the orator, that your charity is a crime, an incentive to slavery, stultification and organised murder. Take a good look at this living corpse. You may say it's his own fault. Ask him if it's his own fault. The voice, Ask him yourself. Then he bent forward and took me to task. I had

perfected my board. It now consisted of two boards hinged together, which enabled me, when my work was done, to fold it and carry it under my arm. I liked doing little odd jobs. So I took off the rag, pocketed the few coins I had earned, untied the board, folded it and put it under my arm. Do you hear me, you crucified bastard! cried the orator. ... He must have been a religious fanatic, I could find no other explanation. Perhaps he was an escaped lunatic. He had a nice face, a little on the red side. (NK 60-62).

The first fragments of this speech signal a parody of Marxist street rhetoric. Taken as a group, these fragments are such clichéd keywords that the reader cannot mistake their reference. However, the narrator, in a pun on incomprehensibility and the origins of rhetoric itself ("It was all Greek to me") manages to combine colloquial and almost literal usage to emphasise his political innocence. He sustains this ingenuous attitude throughout the parody. By contrasting characters at opposite ends of the spectrum of political sensitivity (the orator and the narrator) Beckett emphasises the vehemence of one and the (comparative) insouciance of the other. When the orator turns his attention to our (anti-)hero he slips into an anti-humanitarian form of social Darwinism. Given the Marxist introduction to the speech, this plays ironically on a pragmatism inherent in Marxist doctrine - a utilitarianism which, in very general terms, is revealed in Marxist adherence to the historical and empirical, as opposed to the idealistic. However the orator takes his pragmatic stance to an extreme - his diatribe against the narrator is not only callous, it also exemplifies the expedience of political man, using other men for the purpose of propaganda. The speech is parodic by virtue of its exaggerated and ironic reference to the popular expression of a political doctrine.

The mock-autobiographical nature of "The End" is established by the subtle irony with which the story concludes. The incident with the orator is the last social contact reported by the narrator.

His final refuge is a boat in a deserted shed. He turns this craft into a snug pod for his body. There he hibernates, "content deep down" (NK 65). He finishes his story with a description of a "vision" in which he and his boat drift out to sea. He is chained to the bow. He opens a small hole in the floor and makes himself comfortable as the boat gently sinks (an anti-heroic parody of sea-burial). The narrator finishes "The End" with a retrospectively enlightening remark:

The memory came faint and cold of the story I might have told, a story in the likeness of my life, I mean without the courage to end or the strength to go on. (NK 67).

However, this story is not "The End", since in "The End" the narrator does have "the courage to end" - and in fact describes the way in which he hallucinates or imagines his own death, arranged by himself. Moreover, the narrator of "The End" is far from being without "the strength to go on". He has the stamina (albeit reluctant) and resourcefulness to recreate a situation superior to his original state of comfort, a situation in which he is independent of the whims and treacheries of others. So there are two first-person speakers in "The End", and the final sentence reveals the narrator, without courage or conclusiveness, behind the putative narrator, who has a modicum of these things. In "The End" a narrator creates a positive *persona* for himself, then, conclusively, points up the fictional nature of this *persona*. "The End" is, finally, identified by its maker as an imaginative construct, as opposed to the authentic reminiscence which it initially purports to be.

This disintegration of the conventions of autobiography through the exposure of the fictional content of apparent reminiscence is the great technical contribution which "The Expelled", "The Calmative" and "The End" make to the trilogy.

First Love

In *First Love* a misanthropic - and misogynistic - narrator gingerly recalls experiences which have only the most ironic association with love. His reluctant liaison with a prostitute whose kindness he repays with energetic cruelty travesties the ideals of affection and sharing which his title, *First Love*, and his description of the relationship as "my marriage" (FL 7) or, more modestly, "a kind of union" (FL 61) suggests. Within this overall travesty, the rites of obsessive love are parodied. For example, the narrator asks "Would I have been tracing her name in old cowshit if my love had been pure and disinterested?" (FL 32-33). The act of inscribing the name of the beloved on anything that will hold still long enough is a cliché of infatuated behaviour, but the location of the *First Love* narrator's inscription contradicts his pretended emotion.

Behind such parodic ridicule of love-rituals is a consciousness of the failure of any kind of communication - be it emotional, verbal or literary. Like love, conversation is a "mistake" (FL 22) and the only satisfactory literary form, in the narrator's opinion, is the epitaph. He goes to considerable lengths to undermine the veracity of his own narrative:

I sometimes wonder if that is not all invention, if in reality things did not take quite a different course, one I had no choice but to forget. (FL 24)

... I have always spoken, no doubt always shall, of things that never existed, or that existed if you insist, no doubt always will, but not with the existence I ascribe to them. (FL 33-34)

So his own tale is dubious, or knowingly false. Communication between narrator and reader is further complicated by the capricious and (on one occasion at least) hostile nature of the narrator. At one point he deliberately withholds information:

And the next day (what is more) I abandoned the bench ... for the site no longer answered my requirements, modest though they were, now that the air was beginning to strike chill, and for other reasons better not wasted on cunts like you ... (FL 29)

This invective emphasises the passivity of the reader, making us play victim to the narrator's tormentor.

First Love can be read as a companion-piece to "The Expelled", "The Calmative" and "The End", not only because of the consciousness, common to all, of the fictional nature of apparent reminiscence, or the events they share (such as eviction from the home of a once protective father), but because of the dilemma of shelter versus exposure which is carried over into *First Love*. The later text, however, explores and deplores a more commonplace refuge than that offered by the asylum, stable, cathedral, cave or cabin. In *First Love* the refuge which is embraced and fled from is the flesh and esteem of another individual.

The messages which emerge from these texts are that the artist is necessarily solitary and comfortless, beset by contradiction and conflict. He longs for shelter which he then leaves. He desires and fears his own annihilation. These contradictions are prominent in his actual narrative as well, since his engagement with his story is partial enough to admit self-cancellation or contempt - the narrator of *First Love* likes his epitaph, but "my other writings are no sooner dry than they revolt me" (FL 10). This attitude to narrative results in stories which are overtly fabricated, which consciously and ironically mimic the autobiographical form, in order to reveal its potential for inauthenticity. Such mimicry is inevitably parodic. The echoes and repetitions within the texts are symptoms of this parody and in the trilogy texts they are often, themselves, parodic. Raymond Federman explains the features and effects of this repetition:

By having previous characters appear in subsequent novels, by having their names recur, their actions and idiosyncrasies parodied, by having all his protagonists converge into a single fictional figure, Beckett destroys the notion of credibility and emphasises the counterfeit aspect of fiction.¹²

This "counterfeit aspect" is, itself, an element in Beckett's parody of the conventions adhering to autobiographical narration.

Mercier and Camier, "The Calmative", "The Expelled", "The End" and *First Love* are interesting for their extensive use of parody to break down literary conventions and to provide incidental mockery of cant and affectation. They are also especially valuable as transition works, in which the material, intellectual and (most significantly) literary vagrancy of the Trilogy is tried and anticipated.

12. Raymond Federman, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*, p. 160.

There was no continuity of composition between the trilogy texts: Beckett wrote the unperformed and unpublished play "Eleuthéria" after *Molloy* and before *Malone Dies*, and *Waiting for Godot* came between *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. Yet despite this separate composition, the trilogy has tremendous and conscious unity. This is due to the repetition of image, identity and narrative purpose in the three successive works. The trilogy narrators share a narrative compulsion which, above all else, unites them. "What I need now is stories," says Molloy, then adds, with mischievous self-contradiction: "it took me a long time to know that, and I'm not sure of it" (*Mo* 14). Malone decides to spend his dying days writing: "While waiting I shall tell myself stories, if I can" (*MD* 165). The narrator of *The Unnamable*, addressing himself, reveals and denies his narrative compulsion: "you tell yourself stories, then any old thing, saying, No more stories from this day forth, and the stories go on, its stories still, or it was never stories" (*U* 354). The narrative which supports these stories is itself blatantly fictional, a sustained parody of autobiography. The stories themselves (insofar as they can be separated from this infrastructure of mock-autobiography) help to define the process of literary creation of which they are the product. Such definition is far from positive.

In the trilogy literary creation is revealed as a process of recollection, representation and organisation. Beckett uses the image of confined water as a metaphor for the literary medium. Originally associated, by Proust, with the epiphany of a breakthrough to the past, the image is picked up in Beckett's *Proust*: "the water cries like a siren in the pipes" (*P* 53). It recurs in one of his French poems.¹ Molloy has difficulty with a certain reminiscence. Hinting at its implausibility, he then compares it to bubbles trapped in plumbing, interrupting the smooth flow of narrative:

1. Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, p. 195.

If I go on long enough calling that my life I'll end up by believing it. Its the principle of advertising. This period of my life. It reminds me, when I think of it, of air in a water-pipe. (*Mo* 50)

The trilogy narrators are distressed by the falsifications which the properties of language impose on their (apparent) autobiographies and water is an apt symbol for the literary medium in that it possesses properties of both self-reflection and self distortion. Moran's re-enactment of the Narcissus legend illustrates this well:

And then I saw a little globe swaying up slowly from the depths, through the quiet water, smooth at first, and scarcely paler than its escorting ripples, then little by little a face, with holes for the eyes and mouth and other wounds, and nothing to show if it was a man's face or a woman's face, a young face or an old face, or if its calm too was not an effect of the water trembling between it and the light. (*Mo* 137)

The Unnamable fantasises about an alternative to narrative: "If instead of having something to say I had something to do ... some little job with fluids" (*U* 365-366). In a display of ironic self-deception, the job he imagines for himself is a paradigm of the task of the controlling artist. He would like to service "tanks, communicating, communicating, connected by pipes under the floor ... I'd hear my steps, almost without ceasing, and the noise of the water, and the crying of the air trapped in the pipes" (*U* 366). Then he catches himself telling this story while trying to imagine an alternative to telling stories. The water image is particularly suggestive of the kind of narrative we find in the trilogy: water reflects, but this reflection is obscure and ephemeral; confined to the pipes of the narrative, it traps a transparently non-reflecting substance - air - and the result is a rumbling in the plumbing, a break in the reflecting fluid.

Molloy

In *Molloy* a story of search and quasi-discovery is told and repeated. Molloy, looking for his mother, finds himself in her empty room; Moran, looking for Molloy, encounters a transforming feminine principle. Both find something, but it is not quite what either had expected. If, as John Fletcher suggests, "Molloy is a figure of myth moving in a mythical country whereas Moran is a prosaic wage-earner",² then it is Molloy who encounters the prosaic and Moran who encounters the mythical. Along the way they meet parodies of their goals. Molloy finds a kind of mother in Lousse, the old lady whose dog he replaces, just as it (the dog) stood in for a child. Lousse's clichéd solicitude and self-abnegation identify her as a parody of motherhood. Here is Molloy, describing her persuasive offer of hospitality:

I would adopt the rhythm of life which best suited me, getting up, going to bed and taking my meals at whatsoever hours I pleased. If I did not choose to be clean, to wear nice clothes, to wash and so on, I need not. She would be grieved, but what was her grief, compared to my grief? (*Mo* 45)

So Molloy's search for his real mother is delayed by an unsatisfactory surrogate. Moran also finds his goal in parodic form: his imagination supplies him with a "caricature" (*Mo* 106) of Molloy. This illustrates the way in which Molloy's grandiose reminiscence and Moran's mock-bureaucratic "report" play off one another, but for the moment the point is that both are the stories of quests. However, these quests are neither straightforward nor humourless. In *Mercier and Camier* the derring-do tradition is parodied and in *Molloy* inversion and inappropriateness (the damsel Molloy seeks is a loathly lady from the outset) combine with ultimate failure to parody the heroic and chivalric quest. The quest motif can be seen at the heart of all fiction - Northrop Frye claims to "have identified the central myth of literature, in its narrative aspect, as the quest-myth".³ It is also significant in psychoanalysis. So in

2. John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 127.

3. Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World Inc. (1963), p. 18.

Molloy Beckett is parodying - and thereby mocking - far more than a medieval literary genre, or related ideals of adventure, courage and protectiveness. At the same time he is diminishing the idea that hope can be fulfilled and that advancement means progression. Beneath this over-arching quest parody in *Molloy*, other reductive parodies proliferate.

Ihab Hassan remarks that "*Molloy* embodies all the parodic impulses of Beckett in a form more complete than any he had hitherto devised".⁴ Indeed in *Molloy*'s story the parodic forms and targets occurring in earlier texts are dextrously orchestrated. These include comic caricature, parodic philosophical references, elaborate numerical exegeses designed to parody the idea of attainable mathematical precision and narrative unreliability which turns the whole text into mock-autobiography. Familiar, too, is *Molloy*'s concern with the limitations of language, and an awareness of past and future Beckett fictions. *Molloy*'s story also includes the mock-theology which associates many of Beckett's characters and narrators with Christ, identifying them as sufferers and scapegoats. Beyond this, *Molloy* is adept at the Biblical turn of phrase - the confusion of the night, for instance, is called "that (which) between two suns abides and passes away" (*Mo* 16). More importantly, he associates himself with the serpent and Edenic sin. He recalls "the period I'm worming into now" (*Mo* 18); he describes himself as "neither man nor beast" (*Mo* 19); at the finish he "abandoned erect motion, that of man" (*Mo* 82) in favour of "crawling on his belly, like a reptile" (*Mo* 83). Like the Genesis serpent, which convinced Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he knows about the existence of a "plane of pure knowledge" (*Mo* 84). So *Molloy* the storyteller aligns himself not with the creative godhead but with the persuasive troublemaker. In Genesis God is the creator but the serpent reveals meaning which God would prefer to remain taboo. Through parody, *Molloy*, too, is the "ingenious" (*Mo* 20)

4. Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*, p. 158.

commentator on the concealments of fictional creation and the clichés of received wisdom.

Part of such accepted belief is faith in man's willingness to act the Good Samaritan. But when Molloy "asked the man to help me, to have pity on me. He didn't understand" (*Mo*26). There are two implications to this: either Molloy's request is, like so much conversation in Beckett, incomprehensible to all but himself, or the man has no compassion or inclination to come to the aid of his fellow human being. When Molloy shows us a conventionally compassionate soul, a charitable lady and her offerings, he does so with caricature and ridicule:

... suddenly a woman rose up before me, a big fat woman dressed in black, or rather in mauve. I still wonder today if it wasn't the social worker. She was holding out to me, on an odd saucer, a mug full of a greyish concoction which must have been green tea with saccharine and powdered milk. Nor was that all, for between mug and saucer a thick slab of dry bread was precariously lodged, so that I began to say, in a kind of anguish, its going to fall ... (*Mo* 23)

This offering, without nutrition or appeal, is a travesty of sustenance. Another display of kindness, later in Molloy's story, is equally parodic and useless. An angry mob has gathered to punish Molloy for inadvertently killing Lousse's dog. Lousse pleads for clemency with all the manipulative resources of the impassioned orator, even invoking the memory of her deceased husband, a war veteran, to illustrate her case. In this instance, Lousse caricatures all soap-box orators, anxious to right wrongs from the forum of the pavement. In fact, her concern for Molloy is not as noble or disinterested as her hyperbolic oratory would suggest - if Molloy is to be believed, she wants to detain and drug him. A final example of caricature occurs when Molloy is actually installed under her roof and, having upset the furniture, he acts out a caricature of helpful, houseproud femininity:

I took each object as he straightened it and proceeded with excruciating meticulousness to restore it to its proper place, stepping back with raised arms to assess the result and then springing forward to effect minute improvements. And with the tail of my nightdress as with a duster I petulantly flicked them one by one. (*Mo* 41)

Molloy has retained the skills of ham actor which the narrator of "The End" claims for his younger days.

Emotional generosity and the gestures which arise from it are either absent, disgustingly inadequate, self-interested or mocking in Molloy's story. Reason and philosophy, too, are parodically ridiculed. Through mock-adherence to particular philosophical tenets or partial quotations of images and phrases which are familiar in western philosophy, Molloy mocks these philosophical fragments. For example he ridicules the proposition that abstract principles exist, by bringing such a proposition to bear on the problem of conformity to good manners:

And if I have always behaved like a pig, the fault lies not with me but with my superiors, who corrected me only on points of detail, instead of showing me the essence of the system, after the manner of the great English schools, and the guiding principles of good manners, and how to proceed, without going wrong, from the former to the latter, and how to trace back to its ultimate source a given comportment. For that would have allowed me, before parading in public certain habits such as the finger in the nose, the scratching of the balls, digital emuction and the peripatetic piss, to refer them to the first rules of a reasoned theory. On this subject I had only negative and empirical notions, which meant that I was in the dark, most of the time. (*Mo* 25)

In this, the empirical is devalued. At the same time, the possibility of a non-empirical, largely infallible "reasoned theory" is trivialised. A comparable play on philosophical terms occurs when Molloy "raised my head and saw a policeman. Elliptically speaking, for it was only later, by way of induction, or deduction, I forget which, that I knew what it was" (*Mo* 20). Molloy's intentional muddle is elliptical indeed, if his memory confuses reference from

the general to the particular (deduction) and vice-versa (induction). This then points out the spontaneous and unconscious nature of perception, by introducing a pedantic and confused *description* of a simple act of perception.

The work of a specific philosopher is introduced when Molloy, shadow-boxing against the wall of the police barracks, acts out the famous image of the cave which Plato used to describe men without philosophy. Such individuals are like prisoners held underground, facing a wall. They can see only the shadows of objects and movement behind them, and they take this illusion for reality. The enlightened man, on the other hand, is like the escaped prisoner who sees the substance behind the shadows and seeks to communicate this knowledge and experience to his fellows. In Molloy's hands, there are only prisoners, shadows, and Molloy, a travesty of a philosopher:

A confused shadow was cast. It was I and my bicycle. I began to play, gesticulating, waving my hat, moving my bicycle to and fro before me, blowing the horn, watching the wall. They were watching me through the bars, I felt their eyes upon me. ... The shadow in the end is no better than the substance. (*Mo* 25-26)

Once again, Molloy is an actor. In this charade, enlightenment is as worthless as illusion. The prisoners are looking at the substance (of Molloy), not the shadow, but they are still prisoners. Molloy's story contains another distorted echo of an identifiable philosopher: Kant. Molloy claims that an imperative, then that a hypothetical imperative,⁵ urges him on in his search for his mother. This is a mocking quotation of Kant's doctrine of categorical and hypothetical imperatives, in which the categorical imperative is a duty-bound moral necessity, and the hypothetical imperative is more along the lines of voluntary necessity. By personifying the hypothetical

5. An error in the edition of *The Beckett Trilogy* which is used throughout this thesis renders Molloy's "hypothetical imperative" as "hypocritical imperative". For the purposes of this reference, then, details of the edition which is followed are Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, London, John Calder (1971).

imperative, giving it the form of an ominous external voice, prone to threats and Latin phrases, Beckett undermines the notion of free will and self-originating desires. A similar irreverent philosophical quotation occurs when Molloy describes Lousse's fondness for lavender: "And if I had not lost my sense of smell the lavender would always make me think of Lousse, in accordance with the well-known mechanism of association" (*Mo* 45). This probably alludes to Hume's consideration of association as the "uniting principle among ideas".⁶ Molloy knows that his decayed senses prevent him from ever associating the perfume of lavender with Lousse and this knowledge adds a proviso to Hume's observations about cognition. Perception of resemblance is only possible if the associator's senses are not too deficient to supply him with the raw materials for association, and Molloy suggests that the body has a way of limiting the mind in these matters. In Molloy's story, then, philosophical notions, images and quotations are given fictional projection. But these projections are effective distortions, designed to contradict and mock the meaning which they held in their original context. As such, they are parodies.

Beckett's people exhibit a delight in correspondences which, superficially at least, makes them perfect Humeans. The pattern of the linoleum in the room which Molloy shares with Celia appeals to him because it reminds him of Braque. The narrator of *First Love* appreciates violets and turnips because they smell similar. Molloy says that he "always had a mania for symmetry" (*Mo* 78). However, rather than being a means to an end (of perceiving categories of general meaning in the world at large) such correspondences become an end in themselves. Then resemblances become circular, self-referential and empty of meaning. This appreciation of correspondences among Beckett's people is essentially a kind of mock-precision, reinforcing the illusion that objects - or the idea of certain objects - can be neatly connected and that this connection alone implies the workings of order, harmony and coherence in the world.

6. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London, Oxford University Press (1975), p. 10.

In Beckett's fiction, mock-precision usually reveals its own inauthenticity. Exaggerated mimicry of exactness is inevitably parodic. Molloy's story, for instance, contains an elaborate example of riotous precision, the extravagance of which ridicules its pretensions to accuracy. Molloy has a problem: he sucks sixteen pebbles in what he hopes is equal rotation, but how can he be sure? With an ironic instruction to the reader to "Watch me closely" (*Mo* 67) he describes at length the favoured method which wins out over numerous other "martingales" (*Mo* 66) or constraining harnesses of solutions. However, this solution is ridiculously out of proportion to the problem, as Molloy's final remark attests: "the solution to which I rallied in the end was to throw away all the stones but one, which I kept now in one pocket, now in another, and which of course I soon lost, or threw away, or gave away, or swallowed" (*Mo* 69). The final solution to the problem of retention and distribution of stones is so final that it reduces all the careful speculation which has preceded it to nothing.

As in previous Beckett fictions, Molloy's story contains parodies of literary styles and conventions. The following example recalls the overblown language of the pastoral mode:

... this earthly paradise, suspended between the mountains and the sea, sheltered from certain winds and exposed to all that Auster vents, in the way of scents and languors, on this accursed country, ... (*Mo* 17)

From "earthly paradise" to "accursed country" in a few lines: the contradiction, couched in equally high-flown terms, adds to the formally inauthentic quality of the description. A different kind of literature is parodied when Molloy, ironically castigating himself about his appearance, assumes an exaggerated version of the attitudes underlying extreme social realism:

It is indeed a deplorable sight, a deplorable example, for the people, who so need to be encouraged, in their bitter toil, and to have before their eyes manifestations of strength only, of courage and of joy, without which they might collapse, at the end of the day, and roll on the ground. (*Mo* 24-25)

The "deplorable sight" is Molloy, relaxing on his bicycle. The vision which he, tongue-in-cheek, recommends for the workers is exclusive, palliative, and - if we transpose it across to the narrative level - is propaganda suggesting the worst excesses of social realism. Beckett is wary of the kind of art which buttresses political or social conviction, preferring the open-ended question to narrow affirmation. In his early review of the poetry of Denis Devlin, he defines this position: "Art has always been this - pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric - whatever else it may have been obliged by the 'social reality' to appear."⁷

Molloy's awareness of himself and his task of writing is ubiquitous. He provides a palpable and vivid description of his (writing?) hand, with its "heavily-veined back" and its "pallid rows of knuckles" (*Mo* 13). He gives equally vivid - if superficially enigmatic - definitions of his function as narrator. The following example has as its starting point speculation about an opening story, or reminiscence, in which Molloy, perched on an "eminence", like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, looks down on two characters whom he names, with mathematical precision, A and C. Like the letters in a mathematical equation, existing to be replaced by numbers which the user slots in to fulfil his purpose, Molloy's conjectures invest the blank figures of A and C with a baggage of meaning and motive. The equation analogy also suggests accuracy and in this story Molloy painstakingly questions his own statements, which establishes his good intentions and his attempt to provide veracity, at the same time as it paradoxically undermines and cancels his direct statements. Weighing against his careful show of authenticity is the mythical quality of his tale - one of the characters, like a fairy-tale giant, has a "club with which he sometimes smote the earth until it quakes" (*Mo* 16). However Molloy's self-interrogation on the subject of A and C leads into an important statement about his role as narrator:

7. Samuel Beckett, "Denis Devlin", *Transition*, Vol. 27 (April/May, 1938), p. 289.

A and C I never saw again. But perhaps I shall see them again. But shall I be able to recognise them? And am I sure I never saw them again? And what do I mean by seeing and seeing again? An instant of silence, as when the conductor taps on his stand, raises his arms, before the unanswerable clamour. Smoke, sticks, flesh, hair, at evening, afar, flung about the craving for a fellow. I know how to summon these rags to cover my shame. I wonder what that means. (*Mo* 16)

The objections which begin this passage and the final mock-naivety cannot entirely cancel out the significance of the inner sentences. The image of the conductor parallels Molloy's own narrative orchestration and this image introduces a profound description of what that orchestration involves. Basically, Molloy is exposed and alone with the obscenity of his desire for fellowship. Like a shaman, he calls up familiars. However, these fictional familiars are like gaping, unwhole ("rags") covering his unspecific guilt, his naked need and his essential self. Exposure and covering recall the central theme of "The Expelled", "The Calmative" and "The End". Further meaning is uncovered by Molloy's choice of imagery. The conductor is the interpreter and organiser of a score written by another individual. The shaman whose fire and fetishes call up spirits does not create those spirits. Molloy and his stories are the creations of another, and Molloy knows it. He reveals this when he addresses himself on the subject of literary creation: "You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten" (*Mo* 31). This describes the parrot status of the inauthentic narrator. For Molloy, also, thinking equals listening: "I began to think, that is to say to listen harder" (*Mo* 57). This implies that the content of his mind is dictated from beyond himself. Even more revealing is Molloy's complaint that, under Lousse's influence, the marionette strings which support him slacken more frequently than usual: "I suddenly collapsed, like a puppet when its strings are dropped, and lay long where I fell, literally boneless. ... I was used to collapsing thus" (*Mo* 51).

Contrasting with this evidence of Molloy's manipulated and fictional status is the immediacy of his first-person narration, which creates a strong illusion of genuine experience - whether it be the experience of crafting the text itself or of living through the events which are related in it. Molloy's wit and charm, his disarming frankness and self-scrutiny do not accord with the idea of a wooden puppet. The immediacy which confers authenticity on Molloy partly arises from the urgency of his efforts with the intractable materials of narrative. An author who expresses his confusion and compulsion as eloquently as Molloy, relating his difficulties in statements like: "Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying, or hardly ever" (*Mo* 27) seems to possess a genuinely felt dilemma. Similarly, the illusion of autobiography is put forward in Molloy's story by more than just the use of the "I" voice. Wondering if he is inventing, or embellishing, in the story of A and C, he proposes that "perhaps I'm remembering things" (*Mo* 10). At one point he hints that the narrative may be "only a diary" (*Mo* 58). The statements that diminish our faith in the veracity of the narrative - such as Molloy's description of "that mist too which rises in me every day and veils the world from me and veils me from myself" (*Mo* 28) - which suggests that the text is the product of an entirely blinded and befuddled individual - make Molloy more real, rather than diminishing our faith in *his* autonomy. Yet we must conclude that Molloy is an automaton, a mouthpiece for an anonymous and deeply hidden narrator, if we consider the evidence in his own text, and the knowledge of him as a character (not as a separate brother narrator) exhibited by successive narrators.

The tension between Molloy's overt fictional status and his compliance with the conventions by which we believe in the genuineness of the "I" narrator results in parody of such conventions. The illusion of authentic experience honestly told is both sustained and revealed as a fabrication in Molloy's story. This telling and partial adherence to the forms of first-person narration parodies

such forms. The parody which reveals the "I" speaker as a sham is also aligned, in Molloy's story, with the caricature which is a consequence of Molloy's attempts to define himself. At one point he remarks that "There's a fairly good caricature of my state of mind at that instant" (*Mo* 59). He implies that communication is inevitably and ridiculously approximate - which distorts self-description to the point of caricature. So Molloy, our host and guide, is both the parodic machine for a deeper narrator concerned to point up the mechanics of first-person narration, and an imperfectly revealed machine at that.

The slipperiness of words in Molloy's hands carries over into that most basic connection between word and identity: the name. It is with some difficulty that he remembers his name in the police station. Similarly, he points out that his "sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate" (*Mo* 30). One implication of this is that Molloy, the pseudo-speaker, does not have a strong grasp of his self-hood. At one point he describes a dislocation of identity that is also a dislocation of perception: "it sometimes happens and will sometimes happen again that I forget who I am and strut before my eyes, like a stranger. Then I see the sky different from what it is and the earth too takes on false colours" (*Mo* 40). For Molloy, integrated identity and reliable perception are unattainable. So he is alienated from himself at the same time as he is alienated from words: his tools of trade.

This intransigence of language gives rise to some very funny incidents in Molloy's story. As in previous Beckett fictions, verbal communication is all but a waste of time. Molloy cannot "understand the hundredth part" (*Mo* 36) of Lousse's conversation. It is with effort that he finds the "words and accents" (*Mo* 77) he needs to ask directions from a charcoal burner. But his confrontation with a policeman exploits the comic possibilities of confused dialogue:

Your papers, he said, I knew it a moment later. Not at all, I said not at all. Your papers! he cried. Ah my papers. Now the only papers I carry with me are bits of newspaper, to wipe myself, you understand, when I have a stool. Oh I don't say I wipe myself every time I have a stool, no, but I like to be in a position to do so, if I have to. Nothing strange about that, it seems to me. In a panic I took this paper from my pocket and thrust it under his nose. (*Mo* 21)

Here communication fails because paper has immensely different connotations for the policeman and for Molloy! But the humour is meaningful - this passage suggests that each individual has a subjective language. The length of time required for Molloy to comprehend (or attempt to comprehend) the policeman's request reinforces this. If everybody has his own isolated set of meanings for common words, conversation must not so much be interpreted as translated. Like Watt, Molloy at one point hears words as discrete and "pure sounds, free of all meaning" (*Mo* 47). So meaning is not automatically communicated by language and as the incident with the policeman shows, bad translation is a constant possibility. Molloy then is aware of the limitations of language, conscious that self-definition is caricature and discourse is not necessarily communication.

Yet if Molloy knows about the inadequacy of language, he also knows about its powerful properties, especially as a vehicle for derision or ridicule. This is demonstrated not only by his use of language to parody received wisdom and convention, and his own self-mockery - such as his judgement of his own narrative as "rigmarole", or the mocking self-qualifications which emphasise textual fabrication, like the repeated remark "But to tell the truth (to tell the truth!)" (*Mo* 31) - but by a comment he makes about his mother's title. He tells us that he "called her Mag because for me, without my knowing why, the latter g abolished the syllable Ma, and as it were spat on it, better than any other would have done" (*Mo* 18). Once again the effect of the word is idiosyncratic - only for Molloy does "g" cancel "Ma". However his

almost ritualistic use of the letter suggests that he is conscious of the power of language to defuse significance through derision or ridicule. This is an advance on the amusing conversational *contretemps* which Molloy's story seems to import from *Mercier and Camier*. The point about the limitation and power of language in Molloy's story is that both deficiency and strength contribute to parody in the text. The inadequacy of internal communication - and Molloy's comment about self-caricature - imply that even with the best intentions, communication from narrator to reader is inauthentic and approximate. Molloy is aware of the vulnerability of the relationship between himself and his readers - early in the narrative he asks the unanswerable "do you understand?" (Mo 9). Later, he ironically addresses the reader as "you, to whom nothing is denied" (Mo 43), which is precisely the illusion sustained in omnisciently narrated, un-selfconscious fiction. He also derides the activity which his reader is engaged in, by describing his motives in the days when he too was a reader: "when I thought I would be well advised to educate myself, or amuse myself, or stupefy myself, or kill time" (Mo 78). The textual distortion imposed by the inadequacy of language and the narrator's ironic, or mocking, attitude to his reader establishes an unavoidable level of general parody. At the same time, language is seen as a potent tool for contradiction and derision, and this facilitates the use of specific parody in the service of ridicule.

All the elements which have come under discussion in Molloy's story, ranging from specific to general parody, are part of the overt stylisation of the narrator who is alert to literary contrivance. This quality of contrivance also stems from the repetition of previous and future Beckett texts. Like Cooper in *Murphy* (but with more justification, given his crippled and rigid state) Molloy, late in his journey, finds that "the sitting posture was not for me any more" (Mo 23). Watt is mentioned by name: "they had never heard of Watt" (Mo 71). Like Watt, who is a poor speller, Molloy has "forgotten how to spell" (Mo 9). His characters A and C stand "breast to breast" (Mo 11) in imitation of Watt and Sam.

Molloy conducts a love affair as apathetically as the narrator of *First Love*. Looking ahead, Molloy writes of an inventory, and objects, including a greatcoat, which crop up in *Malone Dies*. A more important echo establishes Molloy's revulsion from the narrative process as he fantasises about levelling the tale itself: "you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery" (*Mo* 14). This creative destruction is the same impulse which informs the conclusive suicide fantasy of "The End" narrator. It receives full expression in *The Unnamable*. However, by far the most important links between Molloy's story and other Beckett fiction exist between Molloy and his hunter and follower: Moran.

The example of self-parody which is considered in the first chapter of this dissertation describes Molloy and his shadowy family: his fancied son and distant mother, and the parodic repetition of filial reunion in *The Unnamable*. However, this is not the sole extent of internal parody of Molloy's story. Moran's report both resembles and contrasts with Molloy's tale. The close relationship between texts has been established by many critics, including Richard N. Coe: "*Molloy* ... falls into two sections, the second being a form of commentary on the first".⁸ The form which this commentary takes is parodic. Similarities between the two texts provide a basis for comparison, at the same time as contrasts in the later text indicate parody. Moran's report does have a life of its own - it is not limited to parody of Molloy's story - but insofar as this parody does exist, it can be examined in relation to three areas of direct and distorted similarity: the circumstances and personalities of Molloy and Moran, their respective quests, and their common consciousness of narrative processes.

8. Richard N. Coe, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 54.

Moran's report describes his metamorphosis from a state of domestic complacency, through journey and crisis, to a condition of detachment from material things, comparative peace and genuine certainty - even if he is only certain of his impending life of vagrancy and his unsureness. Initially, however, he is a caricature of bourgeois smugness: sitting in his orderly garden beneath his roses, listening to the distant sound of croquet. He is a creature of fixed opinions. His household corresponds to Molloy's mirage family: mother, son and grandson, all of whom materialize with dismaying banality. The senior female in Moran's neat and proper establishment - the surrogate mother, in that she performs traditionally maternal housekeeping and culinary tasks - is Martha, a persecuted and irascible servant. Like Molloy's mother, she has a "wizened, grey skull" (*Mo* 89). Just as Molloy suspects Lousse of poisoning him, Moran knows that Martha is capable of adding toxins to his food. The first connection (with Molloy's mother) reinforces maternal qualities which attach themselves to Martha as a result of her activities. The second association (with Lousse, the parody mother) adds to the inauthenticity of Martha's motherhood. Her debased position in Moran's household and her potential malignancy also contribute to this. Moran behaves like a caricature of Victorian fatherhood, rigidly imposing his commands on his dependents. When Molloy is pretending to be his mother, he says "all I need now is a son" (*Mo* 9) - presumably to complete the illusion. But Moran's son, with "his big feet splayed, his knees sagging, his stomach sticking out, his chest sunk, his chin in the air, his mouth open, in the attitude of a veritable half-wit" (*Mo* 119) is far from a desirable relative. In short, Molloy's wished-for family is outrageously burlesqued in Moran's tale.

On one level Moran is a caricature of Molloy. This is established through the ostentatious similarities and equally pointed differences between them. Moran receives a visitor - Gaber - who closely resembles Molloy's mock-editor. As Moran's story progresses, he describes events and alterations in himself which align him with Molloy.

At the conclusion of his journey, Moran looks very like Molloy. He is crippled, decrepit, without bicycle or companion, advised by mysterious disembodied voices. He becomes reptilian and ingenious, saying to himself (with considerable irony considering that he is echoing Molloy): "Ah Moran, wily as a serpent, there never was the like of old Moran" (*Mo* 160). Molloy and Moran describe similar events. During a rest in his travels, Moran is approached by a wanderer who carries a stick "like a club" (*Mo* 134). He is reminiscent of Molloy's character, C. Both narrators are extremely violent. Molloy's victim is a friendly charcoal-burner and Moran kills a visitor to his camp-site. However, Moran's homicide is the more suggestive - he slays his unknown twin. William York Tindall describes this as an act of "Bringing his unconscious self to light and killing his old self, in the shape of a stranger".⁹ This death is an act of liberation from bourgeois strictures. Finally, Moran's sense of identity becomes flimsy. He feels "dispossessed of self" (*Mo* 137) - a sensation which would be familiar to the self-estranged Molloy.

The differences between Molloy and Moran are equally instructive, since in many instances such contrasts are so specific that they, too, resonate. As we have seen, Molloy is aware of the existence of good manners, but his awareness is comical and negative. Moran, in his *paterfamilias* phase, seems to have a constant supply of opinions on the subject. His pedantic emphasis on manners can only recall Molloy's amusing confusion. A similar contrast occurs with the description of Molloy's district. Molloy's description gives the impression of spaciousness and grandeur. He hobbles through "towering forests" and "giant fronds" (*Mo* 72). He also spends time on seemingly endless beaches or negotiating the streets of an apparently populous and complex city. A voice within him says, with authority: "Molloy, your region is vast, you have never left it and you never shall. And wheresoever you wander, within its distant limits, things will always be the same, precisely". (*Mo* 61) Moran briskly trivialises this district:

9. William York Tindall, *Samuel Beckett*, New York, Columbia University Press (1964), p. 45.

By the Molloy country I mean that narrow region whose administrative limits he had never crossed and presumably never would. ... This region was situated in the north, ... and comprised a settlement, dignified by some with the name of market-town, by others regarded as no more than a village, and the surrounding country. This market-town, or village, was, I hasten to say, called Bally, and represented, with its dependent lands, a surface area of five or six square miles at the most. In modern countries this is what I think is called a commune, or a canton, I forget, but there exists with us no abstract and generic term for such territorial subdivisions. (Mo 123).

Moran's description identifies the location as Irish - "Bally" indicating "town" in many Irish place-names. However, Moran's pompously precise geography circumscribes Molloy's description. Moran also debases the air of mythical or religious significance which clings to Molloy's region. According to Moran, only "the ass, the goat and the black sheep" (Mo 124) - all creatures which recall Biblical parables and the Holy Land - can stomach the poisonous weeds of the local pastures. This combination of religion and animal husbandry mocks the spiritual. Similarly, Moran's dismissive record of the traffic in amulets, rosaries and carved madonnas substitutes fetishistic superstition for Molloy's vague mysticism. The differences between Molloy's and Moran's perception of what is clearly the same district are so extreme that they emphasise the subjectivity of observation and reaction. However Moran's distorted view of Molloy's country parodies and ridicules the perspective which Molloy has provided.

The correlation and contrasts between Molloy and Moran add up to personality parody, or caricature. In Moran, Molloy is reborn in monstrous form. It is a more complex and sophisticated rebirth than that which Watt receives in *Mercier and Camier*, but the principle of distorted repetition is the same. This repetition is one step beyond the cross-textual connections which suggest both a communal narrative identity (behind putative narrators) and a closed textual world in Beckett's fiction.

Molloy is an anti-hero and his fruitless, finally delusive search for his mother parodies the mythic and literary quest motif. Molloy alludes to Ulysses on a number of occasions and each reference distances him from the Homeric hero. For Molloy, sirens, ship, mast and bindings are not part of a dangerous adventure, to be experienced and cleverly overcome, they represent elements of the same fragmented psyche in a condition of perpetual torment:

... how removed I was then from him I seemed to be,
and in that remove what strain, as of hawsers about
to snap ... I was straining towards those spurious
deeps, their lying promise of gravity and peace, from
all my own poisons I struggled towards them, safely
bound ... (Mo 21)

Molloy has exorcised the Odyssean hero, eager for illumination: "The Aegean, thirsting for heat and light, him I killed, he killed himself, early on, in me" (Mo 29). The largest area of correspondence and contrast between Ulysses and Molloy lies in the nature of their destinations. Ulysses, in the *Odyssey*, is on a homeward journey and so is Molloy, but Molloy's goal is regressive and unattainable - he seeks the original home of his mother's room, or womb. Molloy's journey, then, burlesques the Homeric quest.

Moran, too, is engaged in a parodic quest. However, the original which is parodied in his report is a modern literary genre: detective fiction. To some extent Moran is a caricature of Sherlock Holmes, who solved criminal mysteries through dispassionately scientific, analytic logic. Moran, before his transformation, has great confidence in "all the resources of my mind and of my experience" (Mo 89). Problems are solved in "my mind, where all I need is to be found" (Mo 120). He is proud of "being a sensible man, cold as crystal and as free from spurious depth" (Mo 104). Like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's hero, Moran has a supply of narcotics (he packs a tube of morphine for his journey). The failure of Moran's quest, and the breakdown of his faith in superficial solutions, hints at the inadequacy of the purely factual and logical investigation.

Youdi, the being who commissions Moran's investigation is, as Ihab Hassan points out, a "parody of God"¹⁰ - or more specifically, a caricature of the Calvinist God. Moran's "quarry" (*Mo* 101) is Molloy. Moran's parodic association with both the chief among literary detectives and a harsh God suggests that Molloy is both a secular and a theological criminal. However, the parallels between the parodic quest in Molloy's tale and Moran's report converge on this crucial issue of goal. Molloy is looking for his mother, the source of his life. Moran is looking for Molloy. As Molloy's caricature, Moran in search of Molloy is also in search of his source. They are denied a conclusive meeting with their originator and original. This is reflected in the form of Molloy's story and Moran's report, which are both circular in structure, implying endless repetition. So both quests are parodies, but the second is joined to the first in a way which emphasises the reflexive, self-parodic quality of Moran's report.

Just as Youdi dispatches Moran on a physical quest which ends in (ultimately regenerative) psychic and physical breakdown, he also orders the composition of the narrative itself. Moran's writing is "penance" (*Mo* 122) and confession, a task he performs with revulsion. The resulting report parodies the formal, bureaucratic style. He introduces himself as "Moran, Jacques" (*Mo* 85) with his surname first as though he expects the reader to compile an alphabetical list of characters. His sentences are brusque and informative. He describes the creative process as though he were an office machine, writing "with a firm hand weaving inexorably back and forth and devouring my page with the indifference of a shuttle" (*Mo* 122). He pompously - and ironically - distances his work from fiction: "it is not at this late stage of my relation that I intend to give way to literature" (*Mo* 139). Parody of the bureaucratic attitude is both amusingly mocking and useful: Moran's narrative astringency makes his report seem precise and

10. Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*, p. 158.

reliable, especially when contrasted with Molloy's fabulous tale. However these connotations of accuracy are ironically undermined by Moran himself. By revealing possible slips as extreme as "I ... took up my haversack, I nearly wrote my bagpipes" (*Mo* 116) he establishes his potential for bizarre fabrication. A confession of deliberate error has a similar effect: "When I said I had turkeys, and so on, I lied. All I had was a few hens" (*Mo* 117). He warns us of his unreliability: "it would not surprise me if I deviated, in the pages to follow, from the true and exact succession of events" (*Mo* 122). The report ends with a direct contradiction of its opening and closing statements. Like earlier Beckett narrators, Moran deliberately states his intention to withhold information: "I'll tell you nothing. Nothing" (*Mo* 124). So Moran, for all his finicky precision, is as great a fabricator as Molloy, for whom narrative accuracy is flexible: "I for my part will never lend myself to such a perversion (of the truth), until such time as I am compelled or find it convenient to do so" (*Mo* 70). Molloy and Moran also share a sense of narrative urgency which they express in almost identical terms. Molloy promises that "in a moment we'll go faster, much faster. And then perhaps relapse again into a wealth of filthy circumstance" (*Mo* 59). Moran too pushes himself on with "Faster, faster" (*Mo* 91). Molloy's tale and Moran's report exhibit a common awareness of their own contrivances. This literary self-consciousness adds to the other correspondences between the two *Molloy* texts.

Such interpenetrations suggest a common authorial consciousness, a narrator behind both Molloy and Moran, adopting exaggeratedly different voices which reveal their kinship even as they contrast with one another. As well as pointing to a unifying intelligence behind tale and report, the repetition in the later text suggests that a literary work is never complete, that a narrator reproduces variations on motifs and expressions throughout the course of his work. Authenticity and originality are, by implication, literary rarities. However, repetition in *Molloy* carries greater import than

these hints about the role of narrator. The two *Molloy* texts do not mirror one another equally. Molloy's tale has titular and chronological prominence. Moran's report is, to some extent, parasitic on Molloy's story. This dependence constitutes parody.

Molloy's story is not the only subject for parody in Moran's report. Moran himself is the target for his son's parodic wit. The child derisively quotes his father's lesson: "There is something, I said, even more important in life than punctuality, and that is decorum. Repeat. In that disdainful mouth my phrase put me to shame" (*Mo* 94). In a later incident Moran, having given his son an enema, instructs him to "let it soak well in" (*Mo* 109). When Moran rubs medication into his knee to ease an excruciating pain, his son pointedly advises him to "Let it soak well in" (*Mo* 110). These domestic exchanges dramatise the workings - and the effect - of mocking parody. Moran's own disdainful pen parodies those familiar targets in Beckett's fiction: theology and philosophy.

Moran, who early in his report accords himself "the most meticulous piety" (*Mo* 88), is something of a hypocritical worshipper, obsessed with the forms of Christian observance, at the expense of the essentials. He does not concern himself with love and forgiveness, but worries deeply about whether or not he can get away with mixing the Mass and a bellyful of beer. In this incident, the miracle of the eucharist is travestied through contrast with Moran's banal speculation. The words of the priest, who after administering the Mass, replies ambiguously to Moran's thanks with "Pah! ... its nothing" (*Mo* 93) add to this travesty. On his homeward journey, Moran is "preoccupied" by "questions of a theological nature" (*Mo* 153). The format of this systematic list of questions is in accord with the parodically bureaucratic quality of Moran's report. A selection of the arcane: "Did Mary conceive through the ear, as Augustine and Adobard assert?" (*Mo* 153); and the heretical: "Might not the beatific vision become a source of boredom, in the long run?" (*Mo* 154); the questions themselves parody ecclesiastical dialectic in much the

same way as the questions of Mr Spiro's chartered accountant in *Watt*.¹¹ Moran's anxiety resolves itself in parodic liturgy, the "quietist Pater" of one who has given up the idea of positive divine intervention in human affairs: "Our Father who art no more in heaven than on earth or in hell, I neither want nor desire that thy name be hallowed, thou knowest best what suits thee" (*Mo* 154). Ihab Hassan remarks that *Molloy*'s "cosmology is 'inside out', its rituals are, like those of the Black Mass, parodies of church rituals. The excremental takes the place of the sacramental".¹² The repetition in *Molloy* parodies liturgical incantation, and the overt creation in which Molloy and Moran are engaged travesties the Genesis creation.

Parody of philosophy in Moran's report is related to the quasi-divinity of the creating narrator. At one point Moran imagines himself:

,,, sitting on a milestone in the dark, my legs crossed one hand on my thigh, my elbow in that hand, my chin cupped in the other, my eyes fixed on the earth as on a chessboard, coldly hatching my plans, for the next day, for the day after, creating time to come. (*Mo* 115)

Moran calls this a "vision", which gives it a supernatural quality. He sits like Rodin's statue of the Thinker, observing and creating, like the traditional image of God. Moran's identification with this passionless, staring creator clarifies a later description: "The sky was that horrible colour which heralds dawn. Things steal back into position for the day, take their stand, sham dead" (*Mo* 128). This is more than an expression of paranoia about the natural world. Moran is parodying Berkeley's notion of the all-seeing God, whose observation keeps the terrestrial world in place. Moran gives this idea fictional projection with comical literalness. His perception of the natural world suggests that things must come furtively adrift

11. Ruby Cohn makes this connection in *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, p. 128.

12. Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*, p. 158.

during the night, then line up as soon as they are illuminated and can be seen by God. The philosophical allusion, then, points mockingly back to its source.

As well as motifs taken from quest myths, theology and philosophy, which are subject to deft, mocking and utterly reductive parody in *Molloy*, Beckett parodies his own fiction. Such self-parody has appeared in Beckett's work from the early days of Walter Draffin's poem in *More Pricks than Kicks*, but in *Molloy* self-parody is sustained. It also meshes with parody of external subjects in a complex manner, so that Moran smoothly caricatures bourgeois smugness, *Molloy* and Sherlock Holmes. At the same time, Moran characterises the misery of the writer, struggling with the difficult necessities of narration. Such complexity marks an advance in Beckett's use of parody. However the dismissive quality of Beckettian parody - the way in which it discredits and ridicules all significance - is as remorseless as in previous Beckett texts.

Malone Dies

Malone Dies has the same stories-within-story structure as *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Decameron* and *The Arabian Nights*.¹³ It is a structure which - as these antecedents demonstrate - facilitates pithy caricature and elaborate fantasy. Like the narrator of *The Arabian Nights*, whose opening prayer, as Richard F. Burton notes, is "Allaho A'alam, a deprecatory formula, used because the writer is going to indulge in a series of what may possibly be untruths",¹⁴ Malone knowingly contrives his fiction. He describes his storytelling as a "journey, down the long familiar galleries, with my little suns and moons that I hang aloft and my pockets full of pebbles (which) stand for men and their seasons" (MD 217).

13. Eric P. Levy draws such a comparison in *Beckett and the Voice of Species: A Study of the Prose Fiction*, Totowa, New Jersey, Gill and Macmillan (1980), p. 57.

14. Richard F. Burton, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, U.S.A., privately printed by The Burton Club, p. 2.

This emphasises the non-naturalistic nature of Malone's narrative, showing the materials of the fictional conjurer's illusions and locating narrator and tales in the halls of art, well away from organic "men and their seasons". Malone's symbols echo Beckett's denunciation, in an early review, of the idea that art functions as illumination: "art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear, any more than the light of day (or night) makes the subsolar, - lunar and - stellar excrement. Art is the sun, moon and stars of the mind, the whole mind".¹⁵ So true art is substance in the cerebral heavens, well away from day-to-day reality and the naturalistic art which seeks to represent such reality. At the same time, the knowingly artificial quality of *Malone Dies* is in tension with the almost palpable reality of Malone and his world. This tension between artifice and plausibility is the most engaging feature of *Malone Dies*. Parody results when the believable quality of Malone's world is contradicted, since in this text revealed artifice is so extensive, so amplified that Malone's discourse parodies the conventions of the "I" speaker. Malone's stories also contain caricatures, travesties and parody of established literary genres and authors. This discussion begins by considering the parodic dimension to Malone's situation, before moving on to the parodies in his stories.

At one point in *Ulysses* Joyce describes the lowest point to which "reverses of fortune" could "reduce" Leopold Bloom. He arrives at the ultimate "nadir of misery: the aged impotent disenfranchised ratesupported moribund lunatic pauper".¹⁶ From such a nadir writes Beckett's Malone. In addition to helplessness and penury, Malone is painfully aware of the "approximateness" (MD 180) - that is to say, the inauthenticity - of his own narration. This awareness follows on from Moran's admission of defeat, as far as narrative veracity is concerned: "Let us be content with paradigms" (Mo 159). Malone, like the Beckett narrators who precede him, inverts the Romantic

15. Samuel Beckett, "Denis Devlin", *Transition*, p. 293.

16. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 646.

conception of the artist as God-like creator. Malone illustrates his physical situation with a little allegory on the subject of the destructive attachment between consciousness and the body:

I have demanded certain movements of my legs and even feet. I know them well and could feel the effort they made to obey. I have lived with them that little space of time, filled with drama, between the message received and the piteous response. To old dogs the hour comes when, whistled by their master setting forth with his stick at dawn, they cannot spring after him. Then they stay in their kennel, or in their basket, though they are not chained, and listen to the steps dying away. The man too is sad. But soon the pure air and the sun console him, he thinks no more about his old companion, until evening. The lights in his house bid him welcome home and a feeble barking makes him say, It is time I had him destroyed. There's a nice passage. (MD 176)

In this allegory of helplessness and betrayed loyalty the body is symbolised by the worn-out but faithful dog and consciousness is symbolised by the master who, after a day of absent diversion, would destroy his pet. This symbolism suggests that the mind can go on beyond the collapse of the servile body and, returning, can plot and control the body's destruction. Such a division is artificial in the extreme, but it is a situation to which Malone aspires as he tries to escape into his fictions and predict his own death. It would indeed be "nice" to exercise such detached pity and control, but Malone's escape is incomplete and his control is limited. Malone's "nice passage" is more, however, than wish-fulfilment. The gap between Malone's decision to move his limbs and the actual movement is "filled with drama". The term "drama" suggests that Malone is engaged in moribund theatre - that is, that he is an actor obeying the instructions of an anonymous director or writer, as opposed to a spontaneous, authentic autobiographer and storyteller. In the following discussion the elements which give Malone's writing a strong sense of actuality are described, then considered against evidence that he is, himself, inauthentic. This will establish the parodic quality of Malone's supposed autobiographical writings.

Malone's descriptions of himself and his environment are so vivid that they confer an almost tactile immediacy on his narrative. For example, the way in which he describes his ears leads us to imagine him (in the absence of a mirror) exploring them, first, with his fingers: "my ears from which there spring two impetuous tufts of no doubt yellow hair, yellowed by wax and lack of care, and so long that the lobes are hidden" (*MD* 190). A description of the intrusions of the world at large, the "doors banging, the steps on the stairs, the noises in the street" (*MD* 201) has the same sensory quality, reminding us that Malone's hearing most often brings this world to him. Such intensely credible reportage also applies to his authorship: "my little finger glides before my pencil across the page and gives me warning, falling over the edge, that the end of the line is near" (*MD* 109). A consciousness of the limitations of his craft also establishes his earnest sincerity. At times he expresses an ostentatious desire for narrative veracity:

I have not been able to find out why Sapo was not expelled. I shall have to leave this question open. I try not to be glad. I shall make haste to put a safe remove between him and this incomprehensible indulgence, I shall make him live as though he had been punished according to his deserts. We shall turn our backs on this little cloud, but we shall not let it out of our sight. It will not cover the sky without our knowing, we shall not suddenly raise our eyes, far from help, far from shelter, to a sky as black as ink. (*MD* 175)

In Malone's view a single omission or falsification threatens the entire tale with obscurity. However, his metaphor for obscurity - "ink" - is also the technical medium of the printed word, so this metaphor subtly disparages narrative itself. Malone himself writes in pencil, thereby, on this occasion at least, escaping his own condemnation. The passage concerning Sapo's averted expulsion is also significant because in it Malone implies that his story is a product of research ("find out") as opposed to imagination. Such an implication adds to Malone's credibility. At the same time Malone manages to parody, in passing, the didactic narrator who sees that his wayward character is "punished according to his

deserts". Malone's anxiety to point out textual distortions with remarks which qualify his narration, like "How false all that rings" (*MD* 230) also makes him seem scrupulously honest. The apparently spontaneous way in which he composes his narrative reinforces this believable quality:

I fear I must have fallen asleep again. In vain I grope, I cannot find my exercise-book. But I still have the pencil in my hand. I shall have to wait for day to break. God knows what I am going to do till then.

I have just written, I fear I must have fallen, etc. I hope this is not too great a distortion of the truth. (*MD* 191)

Such interruption, self-quotation and qualification seem to establish Malone's authorial sincerity. The admission that the previous paragraph may have distorted the truth is reassuring to the reader who, noting that Malone's exercise book is lost in the depths of his bed, wonders what he is using for paper. A further technique for presenting Malone as a straightforward autobiographer, entertaining himself with stories, is the use of reminiscence. This is especially vivid when Malone describes incidents in his childhood: "I remember the soap-pipe with which, as a child, I used to blow bubbles" (*MD* 181); "I have heard aeroplanes elsewhere and have even seen them in flight ... I was present at one of the very first loopings of the loop, so help me God. I was not afraid. It was above a racecourse, my mother held me by the hand" (*MD* 246). There seems to have been a life for Malone before the art of the text. Malone's stories, too, are bolstered with hints that they are based on memories. Of Sapo's family, Malone says "I really know practically nothing about his family any more. But that does not worry me, there is a record of it somewhere" (*MD* 191). This implies that Malone once knew his character's family in the world outside his fiction. The "record" suggests the availability of official information - such as entries in a birth and death register. Similarly, when describing Macmann's companions, Malone suggests

that he was acquainted with these lunatics: "The youth then, Saxon, the thin one and the giant. I don't know if they have changed, I don't remember" (MD 259). Malone's chatty recollections, and the way in which they touch on his stories, implying that his fictions are based on memories, all reinforce his superficial account of his situation: the elderly helpless solitary man, diverting himself with literary ramblings.

Despite the intense plausibility of Malone's account of himself and his stories, his very situation has parodic - and therefore non-naturalistic - overtones. *Malone Dies* is an extended parody of the death-bed scene favoured by Victorian novelists. In such literature religious conversion, revelation of long-held secrets, filial reconciliation or noble resignation are expected of the dying. Malone pointedly inverts such expectations. Malone's is the cosmology of bitterness and suffering. Macmann's excursion is reported to occur during "the Easter weekend, spent by Jesus in hell" (MD 257). Unlike man, God is not accountable for His actions: "to tell the truth God does not seem to need reasons for doing what he does, and for omitting to do what he omits to do, to the same degree as his fellow-creatures, does he?" (MD 225). Malone's epitaph: "Here lies a ne'er-do-well, six feet under hell" (MD 249) defines hell as the conscious life above and before the grave. Religious faith offers no comfort to Malone. Neither does his narrative, which he condemns as "ballsaching poppycock about life and death" (MD 206). The neat reconciliations which are a sentimental feature of certain literary death-beds are parodied, in *Malone Dies*, through a vehement curse: "I forgive nobody. I wish them all an atrocious life and then the fires and ice of hell" (MD 166). Resignation to the fact of his own mortality is only partial: "there is no good pretending, it is hard to leave everything" (MD 254). Malone's inversion of the conventions of literary deathbeds increases his own artificiality, making him seem more like a mouthpiece through which to ridicule the bathos and sentimentality of an outmoded narrative cliché, rather than a genuine author, drawing on his experience in the world external

to literature. As elsewhere in Beckett's fiction, parody discredits superficial meaning, mocks convention and distances the work from the naturalistic world.

Malone's prose is as graphic and grotesque as that which begins "The Calmative", but such explicitness does not, ultimately, confer authenticity. Malone contradicts his own illusion of genuine, non-fictional existence. His consciousness of the invented nature of his tale goes beyond an awareness of the falsifying tendency of narrative to reveal the invented nature of those parts of the text which we take to be factual descriptions of himself and his situation. Direct self-contradiction, such as "I go twenty-four hours without a pot. No, I have two pots" (MD 170) suggest that he is improvising the description of his situation,¹⁷ making all his ostentatious concern for accuracy seem ironic. This turns his narrative into a parody of autobiography, the effect of which is to emphasise the fictional content of believable first-person narration. When Malone puts himself in the same category as his character: "I write about myself with the same pencil and in the same exercise-book as about him" (MD 191) he reveals that he is an invention, a made-up character like Sapo. He even hints that his vivid recollections of childhood are dubious, stories about "that child I might have been" (MD 191). A direct admission of fictional identity - as opposed to fictional creation at the basis of which lies non-literary experience - occurs late in the text, when Malone confesses that his "exercise-book is my life, this big child's exercise-book, it has taken me a long time to resign myself to that" (MD 252). This remark, considered with other evidence for autobiographical falsification in *Malone Dies*, can be seen as a literal statement about Malone's situation as a character who has life only in words on paper. As J.D. O'Hara has pointed out, in *Malone Dies* "the separation of creator and creation cannot be maintained".¹⁸ Malone's fictional nature is perhaps responsible

17. J.D. O'Hara uses this, and other fragments of Malone's discourse, to exemplify Malone's fictional status. J.D. O'Hara, "About Structure in *Malone Dies*", J.D. O'Hara (ed.), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy Malone Dies The Unnamable*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall Inc. (1970), p. 65.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

for his alienation from humanity - he writes with detachment about "the race of men ... All I want now is to make a last effort to understand, to begin to understand, how such creatures are possible" (MD 183). Malone is estranged from the species in which his own creator, the shadowy and anonymous voice behind Malone's fraudulent "I", has placed him.

The fictional nature of Malone's identity is also supported by the way he refers to other works written by Beckett. This situates him, as well as his discourse, in the world of internally referential art. The folkloric explanation for markings on the moon, which Belacqua ponders in *More Pricks than Kicks*: "The spots were Cain with his truss of thorns, dispossessed, cursed from the earth, fugitive and vagabond" (MPK 11) is reproduced in a description of "the moon where Cain toils bowed beneath his burden" (MD 183). Murphy's rocking-chair appears, supporting a young lunatic. Malone also recalls Murphy's experience among the lunatics of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat and he mentions the skylight in Murphy's garret and the butler whose suicide distressed Celia. Malone claims to hear the "mixed choir" (MD 191) familiar from *Watt*. He describes the "forest of high threshing ferns" (MD 208) traversed by the narrator of *First Love*. Like Molloy and Moran, Malone's character Macmann is "by temperament more reptile than bird" (MD 223). The glass-topped wall which encloses Lousse's garden in *Molloy* also surrounds the lunatics in Macmann's asylum. These references are not only retrospective: when Malone fantasises about seizing a little girl for a companion, then worries about whether or not she would throw herself out of his window he predicts the attempted suicide of Pam Prim in *How It Is*. These references distance Malone from the illusion of autonomous, non-fictional identity which his "I" voice suggests and which he has been at pains, for much of his narrative, to sustain. The actual parody of an incident in *Molloy* reinforces the internal quality of the trilogy texts and the fictional status of their narrators. Molloy describes his visits to his mother: "we were like a couple of old cronies, sexless, unrelated, with the same memories, the same rancours the same expectations" (Mo 18). In the light of Molloy's difficulty in

finding, let alone communicating with his mother, and his intimations of incestuous congress with her, this description is ironically self-delusive. He communicates with her by tapping her on the head. This language of repeated knocks is difficult for Molloy to establish, since his mother forgets as quickly as she is hit. The series has no meaning for her. Molloy replaces his polite knocking with "thumps of the fist, on her skull" (*Mo* 19). This incident is repeated, in inverted and distorted form, in *Malone Dies*. Toward the end of Malone's narrative, he receives a mysterious and sinister visitor who deals him "a violent blow on the head" (*MD* 247). In this distorted echo of the *Molloy* incident, Malone plays the part of Molloy's mother: victimised and uncomprehending. The stand-in for Molloy (whom Malone, understandably, thinks may be an undertaker's assistant) can neither hear nor be heard by Malone, and from the point of view of this stand-in, Malone must indeed seem "sexless" and "unrelated". This parody of Molloy's meeting with his mother offers a retrospective interpretation of both Molloy's status and the nature of his quest for his mother. As we have seen in the earlier discussion of *Molloy*, Molloy does not have existence outside his fiction. He is an inauthentic autobiographer, the artificial creation of another narrator. Molloy is looking for his originator, but since he was born, not from the body of a woman, but from the pen of a narrator, this search is inevitably fruitless. It may, indeed, be a self-delusive attempt on the part of Molloy, to establish an organic, as opposed to a fictional, identity. In the context of masculine creation which prevails in the trilogy, Molloy's "mother" - that is, his creator - has to be a male narrator. When Malone remarks that his death will finish off "the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones" (*MD* 217) the knowledge of previous Beckett characters and the claim that they will be extinguished with him suggests that he thinks he is their creator. To this extent, he is Molloy's originator. By arranging a parodic meeting between a travesty of Molloy and Moran, his pseudo-creator, Beckett is reinforcing Molloy's fictional identity and emphasising the mutually unsatisfactory state of affairs between fictional creator and creation. If it is a parodic

representation of Molloy who strikes the helpless Malone, the blow constitutes the persecution of a narrator by his character - the reverse of the arbitrary destruction of characters which occurs in Malone's narrative. Parody once again disintegrates superficial meaning to reveal the desperation of the true state of affairs.

The fictional quality of Malone's identity is established by references to other Beckett texts and by self-parody. However, it is also illustrated by parodic allusion to a literary work outside the Beckett canon: Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Early in his narrative, Malone boasts about his control over his characters. He seems to adopt the stance of a casting director: "If I said, Now I need a hunch-back, immediately one came running, proud as punch of his fine hunch that was going to perform. It did not occur to him that I might have to ask him to undress" (MD 166). This suggests the mis-shapen nature of Malone's narrative cast and it also establishes his intention to expose ("undress") the characters he calls on. The image of the humiliated hunchback could be used as a metaphor for Malone himself, later in the text, as the directions of his mysterious narrator seem to require him to conceal, or alternatively to uncover, his essential shape. Malone's communality with the deformed victim whom he describes - in what must surely be an exercise in wish-fulfilment - as the "hunchback" who "came running" at his command is reinforced by his identification with Quasimodo, the deformed bell-ringer of Notre Dame cathedral in Victor Hugo's novel. Malone's recollection of festive persecution, when "grown-ups pursued me, the just, caught me, beat me, hounded me back into the round, the game, the jollity" (MD 179) recalls the carnival scene in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, in which Quasimodo is mockingly fêted. Malone's refuge from this harsh "jollity" is described as "sanctuary" (MD 179), recalling the medieval custom of providing sanctuary in the cathedral, which Quasimodo uses to save Esmeralda in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Malone's description of soaring "aloft through the stinging air towards an inaccessible boon", experiencing "the rapture of vertigo, the letting go" (MD 179) re-creates the rescue itself, in which

Quasimodo, accustomed to swinging on the ropes of the cathedral bells, swoops across the gulf between church and scaffold and swings Esmeralda to safety. For Malone, however, such a "boon" is "inaccessible". Like Quasimodo, he is persecuted and set apart, but unlike Quasimodo, Malone's essential nobility is not revealed. There are no tragically beautiful gypsies in Malone's room. The echoes of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* are parodic in that they both evoke and contradict the original text. The ultimate message of this parody is that being grotesque and deformed is a condition of being fictional and that saving grace is inaccessible.

Turning from Malone's situation to the stories inspired, or so he claims, by the desire to divert himself, we find more revealing and reductive parody. Established authors and literary genres are mocked in Malone's tales. These stories also insist on the mediocrity of the bourgeois, the brutality of the husbandman and the folly of the charitable.

Malone's first story is a travesty of his stated intention to begin with a tale about a man. Saposcat is a dull schoolboy for whom Malone, in accord with his desire to "be tepid", (MD 165) cannot marshall much enthusiasm. Malone's intrusive refrain is "What tedium". Other intrusions reflect playfully on the qualities of fictional creation: in a literal-minded pun, Malone follows his description of Sapo's failed concentration - "He attended his classes with his mind elsewhere, or a blank" (MD 172) - with an actual gap in the print, as if to illustrate what such a lapse on the part of a fictional character should look like on paper. Later, Malone uses Sapo to suggest that thought begins with language: "he was sorry he had not learnt the art of thinking, beginning by folding back the second and third fingers the better to put the index on the subject and the little finger on the verb" (MD 177). Beyond the irony of identifying a very plodding and elementary grammatical analysis with thought, lies the suggestion that for the overtly fictional character, who only exists insofar as he

appears in words on a page, and whose (putative) creator, Malone, denies the conventional assumption of a life beyond the text, sentences do indeed indicate the entire extent of thought. Malone's intrusions - such as the mock-approving remark "How plausible all that is" (*MD* 183) - constantly limit the narrative to its barest manifestation as words on a page, contradicting the assumption which we bring to more naturalistic fiction: the assumption that although we may not be told what the characters eat for breakfast, we do not conclude that they went hungry.

The social poles of Sapo's world - his bourgeois parents and the peasants whose guest he is - allow Malone to caricature these groups and to parody literature in which they appear. Malone's description of the elder Saposcats illustrates the rigidity, triviality and ultimate futility of their existence:

The life of the Saposcats was full of axioms, of which one at least established the criminal absurdity of a garden without roses and with its path and lawns uncared for. I might perhaps grow vegetables, he said. They cost less to buy, said his wife. ... Think of the price of manure ... Mr Saposcat applied his mind, with the earnestness he brought to everything he did, to the high price of manure which prevented him from supporting his family in greater comfort. ... Nothing remained but to envisage a smaller house. But we are cramped as it is, said Mrs Saposcat. And it was an understood thing that they would be more and more so with every passing year until the day came when, the departure of the first-born compensating the arrival of the new-born, a kind of equilibrium would be attained. Then little by little the house would be empty. And at last they would be alone, with their memories. It would be time enough then to move. He would be pensioned off, she at her last gasp. They would take a cottage in the country where, having no further need of manure, they could afford to buy it in cartloads. (*MD* 172-173)

The unattainable equilibrium of manure ridicules the Saposcats' aspirations as far as they themselves are concerned, but for their son Sapo they cherish the clichéd bourgeois ambitions of a career

in law or medicine. As a starting-point for such a career, Mr Saposcat buys his son a fountain-pen for use in his approaching examinations. This provokes much anxiety and bickering between himself and his spouse. The Saposcats are caricatures of bourgeois life, revealing empty habit, limited aspirations and trivial-mindedness. Their description also parodies Louis-Ferdinand Céline's similarly exaggerated couple in *Journey to the End of the Night*.¹⁹ Here is the description of the Henrouilles, as it appears in John H.P. Marks' translation:

Before they were married the Henrouilles had already thought of buying a house. First each thought of it on his own, then they thought of it together. They had refused to think of anything else for half a century ... their great fear, the worry of their whole lives (was) that their son, their one and only son, who was in business, might do badly. For thirty years that awful thought had pretty well spoiled their sleep at night. In the pen business, that boy of theirs. Just think what ups and downs there have been in the pen trade these last thirty years! ... (Finally) they had nothing more to worry about, either of them, with regard to their financial security. That was in their sixty-sixth year.²⁰

The Saposcats and the Henrouilles have in common a concern with property and finance on a domestic scale, anxiety about the career of their child and ultimately wasted lives. At the forefront of both Beckett's and Céline's descriptions is conscious banality. Though similar in tone and detail (even down to a common concern for the pen business) Céline provides his couple with homicidal tendencies which condemn them. This difference establishes the parodic quality of Beckett's allusion to Céline's Henrouilles, for Beckett does not allow his creatures even criminal relief from the tedium of their existence. Their enduring banality is somehow more damning than the murderousness of the Henrouilles, and by leaving

19. Beckett's familiarity with the work of Céline has been established by Ruby Cohn in *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, where she quotes from her correspondence with Beckett: "Yes, I had read Céline before the war". p. 319.

20. Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books (1934), pp. 216-218.

the Saposcats sulking at each other over a fountain-pen Beckett revises Céline's caricature of bourgeois life, exhibiting and emphasising the petty narrowness of his victims. Conrad Knickerbocker has expressed the same ideas through a parody of contemporary American catch-cries, describing a fear "not so much of the cliché of the Bomb as the more awful prospect that we will survive after all only to win the space race and eliminate washday blues".²¹

In contrast to the petty anxieties of Sapo's parents, the characters in the second half of the Sapo story, the Lamberts, are in close proximity to the major existential event: death. The killing of pigs, mules, rabbits, hens, pigeons and kids is commonplace in this story. The rosy fireside conversation which accords with a sentimental view of rural, pre-technological society is taken up with Big Lambert's reminiscences on the subject of butchery: "Lambert continued to expiate, to his near and dear ones, of an evening, while the lamp burned low, on the specimen he had just slaughtered, until the day he was summoned to slaughter another. Then all his conversation was of this new pig, so unlike the other in every respect, so quite unlike, and yet at bottom the same" (MD 184). This reflects Malone's own obsession with impending death, but it also parodies the cliché of fruitful rural life and the sturdy folk who live it. Ruby Cohn has remarked on "the Sapo-Lambert parodies which brilliantly ridicule various fictions of parvenus and primitives".²² The Lamberts' land is described in terms which pointedly invert ideas of man in harmonious accord with nature: "The farm was in a hollow, flooded in winter and in summer burnt to a cinder" (MD 184). The Lambert farm is a place of death, sterility (Big Lambert cannot even successfully raise a pig) and oppression. It is a place of danger for the vulnerable - like the immature animals which Lambert slaughters, his grudgingly compliant wife and the daughter whom he desires. The Lambert story is a continuation of those derisive parodies of the pastoral mode which appear in Beckett's earlier fiction, and caricatures of the peasantry like the Lynch story in *Watt*. Like the Lynch women, whose afflictions are, for the most part, related to their female

21. Conrad Knickerbocker, "Humor With a Mortal Sting", in Douglas M. Davis (ed.), *The World of Black Humor*, New York, E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc. (1967), p. 300.

22. Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, p. 126.

biological functions, Mrs Lambert "told herself she had a woman's disease" (MD 199). The caricatured peasants in the Sapo story mock the hope that a fruitful and cheerful life is possible in the country, away from Malone's noisy, granite-walled city, or the dismal little houses of the bourgeoisie which Malone ridicules through the description of Sapo's parents.

The description of Sapo himself introduces an element of reductive caricature. Sapo, with his "big round head horrid with flaxen hair as stiff and straight as the bristles of a brush" (MD 175) resembles young Jacques Moran in *Molloy*, whose "big blond skull" (Mo 119) so exasperates his father. Such repetition diminishes the integrity of the individual texts and undermines the credibility of the character - so that Jacques and Sapo seem each to be a stock-character, produced whenever narrative necessity suggests a male child. However Sapo also, as John Fletcher has pointed out, "bears some resemblance"²³ to Beckett as a boy. The self-portrait is a most disparaging caricature.

When, after one of Malone's lengthy digressions from overt fictional creation, he returns to his story, it is to dispense with Sapo, changing first his appearance (with the exception of his distinctive eyes), then his name. Sapo melts into Macmann. The annihilation of a character illustrates Malone's intention to "try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say. And seeing what a poor thing I have made, or how like myself, I shall eat it" (MD 207). In this, Malone is a travesty of motherhood, cradling a "creature" who looks like himself. Biblical creation is also travestied - just as God made man in his own image, Malone claims to reproduce himself in his characters. The final sentence, in which Malone describes himself consuming his creature, predicts the way in which he takes characters

23. John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 175.

like Sapo back into himself, replacing them with substitutes which will, in their turn, be annihilated. This process is entirely reductive. It demonstrates the inadequacy of each character, as far as his self-proclaimed creator is concerned, it demonstrates Malone's narrative expediency, and it suggests that the text is the whimsical fabrication of a destructive artist.

In the Macmann story the sterility of the Lamberts is reintroduced in a modified form. Macmann's incompetence as a gardener is described as an "urge to make a clean sweep and have nothing before his eyes but a patch of brown earth rid of its parasites" (MD 224). Beautiful or useful growing things such as flowers and vegetables are nothing more than parasites, in Macmann's eyes. This sterile destructiveness also emerges in the parodies which the Macmann story contains. During the course of his narrative, Malone has Macmann institutionalised. He and Moll, his nurse, conduct a romance which demonstrates the futility of love and the banality of literature which is inspired by love. Moll and Macmann's verse and love letters are parodies of their kind.²⁴ The effect of this parodic ridicule is to deride the idea that extension beyond oneself - in the form of friendship, sexuality or pregnancy - is positive and worthwhile. Moll is superseded by the vicious and pragmatic Lemual.

Malone Dies (and the story about Macmann) concludes with pessimistic parodies. Macmann's final journey beyond the asylum gates is an excursion under the patronage of Lady Pedal, a "huge, big, tall, fat woman" tricked out in veiling and artificial flowers, singing an exaggeratedly cheerful hymn. Like Molloy's mauve woman, Lady Pedal is a caricature of the charitable society lady, the type who "was well off and lived for doing good and bringing a little happiness into the lives of those less fortunate than herself" (MD 257) - provided that such opportunities to do good only occur

24. The parodic qualities of these lyrics and letters are discussed in detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

"on an average once every two years" (MD 257). Having condemned the paucity of Lady Pedal's charitable impulse, Malone uses Lemuel to crush her on the rocks of her seaside retreat. A few murders later the lunatics and their attendant are floating in a boat. Northrop Frye describes the parodic implications of this scene:

Malone dreams of his own death, which is simultaneously occurring in a vision of a group of madmen going for a picnic in a boat on the Saturday morning between Good Friday and Easter, a ghastly parody of the beginning of the Purgatorio. Dante's angelic pilot is replaced by a brutal attendant named Lemuel, a destroying angel who murders most of the passengers.²⁵

This scene is the culmination of a series of maritime images in the preceding text. Molloy describes himself "boating in a sort of oarless skiff ... paddled with an old bit of driftwood" (Mo 64). Malone, speculating about death, calls such speculation "taking a reef in your sails" (MD 182). On another occasion he describes his disturbed soul, "denied in vain ... in the night without haven or craft" (MD 204). He thinks that he may have "missed the ebb" (MD 232). Such incidents and images recall St Brendan, the Irish missionary, setting off in his coracle to save the souls of the heathen. They also bring to mind the gospel story of Jesus, who "withdrew privately by boat to a lonely place" (Matthew 14:13) after the death of John the Baptist. He came ashore to perform the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. Such recollections are, however, parodic, for there will be no salvation or provision for Beckett's people.

In *Malone Dies* parody continues to destroy illusions of hope, comfort or progression. Art and thought, the final areas of solace for the materially oppressed, are shown to be instruments of oppression in themselves and the creating artist, largely stripped even of the illusion of believable identity, turns his parodic derision claustrophobically inward upon the confused, ambiguous microcosm of the fictional self and its fictional creations. This is the "nadir of misery" (to use Joyce's term) which Malone endures and the Unnamable takes from him.

25. Northrop Frye, "The Nightmare Life in Death", in J.D. O'Hara (ed.), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy Malone Dies The Unnamable*, p. 32.

The Unnamable

Beckett has never written the kind of literature which provides a cumulative plot-line, working through a "plausible concatenation" (P 62) of events (indeed he ridicules such literature through parody). Instead much of the success of his work results from an extreme *psychological* plausibility. Readers of a work such as *The Unnamable*, in which the nature of empirical reality is ambiguous and even the illusion of a social reality is absent, respond to Beckett's insight into a desperate psyche, beset by conflicting impulses and the threat of utter meaninglessness. One is carried along by the velocity of a psyche expressing - and struggling with the need to express - its schismatic state. During the course of this expression the narrator's pretences are manifold as he slips from one clearly erroneous self-definition to another. However, three adopted stances - that of the vaudeville artist, the prisoner and the demon - are of particular significance. Each is a caricature of a popular stereotype (the demon, as we shall see, is the Unnamable equipped with the little horns of the folkloric devil). Such caricatures seem to preside over three vital areas of parody in *The Unnamable*. As a caricature of the vaudeville entertainer the narrator visualises and discredits his own narrative performance and parodies those fictions which appear in other Beckett texts. He also parodies literary traditions and narrative clichés. As a caricature of a prisoner he is a histrionic victim, derisively parodying legalistic jargon in order to attack the illusion of secular justice. As demon he speaks from outside beneficent Christian theology: his is the voice of pure sin and guilt, parodying Christian doctrine by profoundly distorted imitation. In this way, parody makes all remedies seem merely palliative and leaves the Unnamable in a situation in which his own bad timing - his consciously inadequate performance - reveals the sense of oppression and damnation to which it also contributes. Despite the knowing artificiality which caricature and extensive parody create, the Unnamable is a profoundly sympathetic character - not in the sense that he displays compassion towards himself, his victims or his tormentors, but because his vital psychological plausibility invites rapport.

At one point the Unnamable addresses the reader, or perhaps himself, with a metaphor for the text as a variety show which doesn't get off the ground:

... there's an audience, it's a public show, you buy your seat and you wait, perhaps it's free, you take your seat and you wait for it to begin, or perhaps it's compulsory, a compulsory show, you wait for the compulsory show to begin, it takes time, you hear a voice, perhaps it's a recitation, that's the show, someone reciting, selected passages, old favourites, a poetry matinée, or someone improvising, you can barely hear him, that's the show, you can't leave, you're afraid to leave, it might be worse elsewhere, you make the best of it, you try and be reasonable ... perhaps it's not a voice at all, perhaps it's the air, ascending, descending, flowing, eddying, seeking exit, finding none, and the spectators, where are they, you didn't notice, in the anguish of waiting, never noticed you were waiting alone, that's the show, waiting alone, in the restless air, for it to begin, for something to begin, for there to be something else but you, for the power to rise, the courage to leave ... that's the show, free, gratis and for nothing, waiting alone, blind, deaf, you know where, you don't know for what ... (U 351)

This is a denial of the durability of art, entertainment and companionship. The image of the inaudible entertainer in the empty theatre is a double metaphor. On the one hand it stands for the reader's situation, confronted with the recitation or improvisation of the Unnamable's discourse, which seeks to fade into silence. On the other hand the Unnamable may be placing himself in the stalls of an empty theatre, hoping that another entertainer with a more confident recitation or improvisation will begin. The address to "you" - which could mean the reader, or could be a substitute for "one" - creates this ambiguity. However, the point is that the Unnamable's metaphor undermines expectations of recognisable art, comprehensible entertainment and companionship, and the motif which the Unnamable uses for this reductive purpose is the discourse and the environment of the vaudeville entertainer. At other times he adopts the stylised gestures of the stage comic. Answering his own question, he writes "frankly, hand-on-heart" (U 270). A similar appeal to the reader's credulity resembles a comedian's patter:

"I ... give you my word, spoken in jest" (U 286). Earlier he has described himself immobilised in the wings of an imaginary theatre: "You think you are simply resting, the better to act when the time comes, or for no reason, and you find yourself powerless ever to do anything again" (U 267). No cues call the Unnamable on to his empty stage. As a variety artist, his particular forte is ventriloquism: he calls his characters "puppets" (U 267), "mannikins" (U 280) which, like entertaining toys, arrive in "the world unborn, abiding there unliving" (U 318). Specifics aside, the Unnamable is a vaudevillist past his prime, telling stories without conviction with the aid of puppets which he destroys as he uses. The following discussion considers his parodic mockery of his own narrative performance as he consciously gives a distorted imitation of genuine first-person discourse. The way in which he uses self-parody to discredit earlier fiction by Beckett is also discussed, along with his parody of the works and conventions of other writers.

In *The Unnamable* we have the complete loss of even the illusion of fictionally autonomous identity which Malone partially sustains. Repetitive self-contradiction such as "I, say I. Unbelieving" (U 267), destroys the traditional authenticity of the "I" voice almost as soon as the pronoun issues from its putative source. The narrative is discredited, outright, by its apparent creator's description of it as "all lies" (U 278). This sense of fabrication, working against the traditional authority of the "I" speaker, also occurs when the narrator interrupts and contradicts his description of himself: his tears "gather in my beard and from there, when it can hold no more - no, no beard, no hair either" (U 279). Yet later in the text, as if to overturn these contradictions, the Unnamable claims to have "invented it all, in the hope it would console me" (U 288). This qualification and counter-qualification results in complete uncertainty and such uncertainty is the very opposite of the conventional effect of first-person narration. Although the narrator of a work such as *Tristram Shandy* exhibits the contrivances of his medium, documenting, as James E. Swearingen has pointed out:

... the obstacles that arise in the writing such as the need to convey his diachronic, temporal being in synchronic, spatial chains of printed words and the difficulty of making words, so slippery that the characters cannot understand each other, carry all the misunderstood meanings over to the reader with clarity and precision of nuance,²⁶

such a narrator does not overtly turn his literary self-consciousness back on himself, concluding, as does the Unnamable, that "I'm in words, made of words, others' words" (*U* 355) while still using the "I" voice which, by virtue of convention, makes him seem non-fictional. The Unnamable's combination of this voice with an awareness of his fictional status makes his use of the pronoun "I" parodic: a partial, distorted and conscious imitation of first-person narration. Like the previous parodies of the "I" speaker in Beckett's fiction, this parody is essentially destructive. Not only does it substitute uncertainty for the conventional authority of first person narration, it casts doubt on the solidity of identity in general.

Mahood, the Unnamable's first developed character, is described as a "caricature" (*U* 289) - presumably of his creator. As we have seen in the first chapter of this thesis, he is also a caricature of Molloy and his journey back to his family is a derisive parody of Molloy's quest. He next appears as an advertising gimmick, immobilised in a jar outside a restaurant, before melting into the elusive and ambiguous creature, Worm. Ross Chambers describes the parodic implications of such shifts in characterisation, suggesting that the Unnamable is:

... re-inventing the trilogy itself, or rather creating a strange, desperate parody of it, in which Mahood is first a kind of Molloy and then a kind of Malone and finally a Worm appears who is a kind of Unnamable, so that, if Beckett wished, the work could go on spiralling into itself forever commenting on itself ...²⁷

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26. James E. Swearingen, *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy: An Essay in Phenomenological Criticism*, New Haven, Yale University Press (1977), p. 253.
27. Ross Chambers, "Beckett's Brinkmanship" in Martin Esslin (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 155.

Such regressive commentary derides the work which it re-invents, for not only is such a re-invention undertaken in terms which are unflattering to the original character, but when a character is re-drawn his earlier portrait is no longer current and becomes obsolescent. Malone, for example, re-appears in the first pages of *The Unnamable* as a zombie, mechanically and perpetually circling the Unnamable. It seems as though Malone's mouth has fallen open in death, for in a grotesque attempt to be his own mortician, "with his two hands he props up his jaw" (U 268). This caricature finally destroys Malone's claims to organic life, revealing him, in the fiction beyond *Malone Dies*, as a mechanical - "clockwork" (U 269) -- device equipped with a minimal and improbable resemblance to an actual corpse. Such destructive caricature from a narrator who claims to have invented Malone and his predecessors reproduces Malone's own stated intention to consume the creature he has created and, like a mother, held in his arms. The Unnamable continues this travestied imagery of motherhood - he writes of being "delivered of Malone" (U 274). He suggests that his own narrators have "blown me up with their voices, like a balloon" (U 298) and later describes "words bellying out my sails" (U 324) which recalls the pregnant woman in *Watt*, with her belly "sticking out, like a balloon" (W 10). The Unnamable's use of this image for organic creation is ironic in the extreme, since it occurs in a context which is saturated with his awareness of his own fictional status and consciousness of his own masculinity. The Unnamable, then, is a travesty of maternity and the creatures of which he is delivered are caricatures of their trilogy antecedents. Not content with parodic mockery, the Unnamable unleashes direct invective on his narrative and those which precede it, complaining about "a ponderous chronicle of moribunds in their courses, moving, clashing, writhing or fallen in short-lived swoons" (U 283). As a fictional creator, then, the Unnamable is also destructive and "strange, desperate parody", to use Ross Chambers' words, is an agent of such destruction.

As well as the general parody of the convention that the first-person narrator is relating lived experience, and the derisive

parody of earlier Beckett texts, the Unnamable parodically misquotes other works. His distorted allusion to the final song of *Twelfth Night* rejects maturity: "I had no predispositions for man's estate" (U 321). Macbeth's bitter speech about human life as a transient appearance on stage is made still more bleak in the Unnamable's quotation - his narrators are said to be "assailing me with noises signifying nothing" (U 322). In the Unnamable's version there is no illusion of meaning even for the actor in life's brief drama. He also parodies narrative clichés - death is described as "his debt to nature" (U 302), which is deeply ironic, considering his non-naturalistic status. He uses mock-pomposity for contrasts of tone - during his "adhesion" (U 290) to Mahood, when Mahood sits in his jar watching the restaurant of his protrectress, he remarks on "the fruit of my observation accumulated over long period of years and constantly subjected to a process of induction. Here all is killing and eating" (U 313). The stark brutality in this final sentence reinforces the parodic quality of the pompously mock-philosophical sentence which preceded it. Naturalistic literature is described in a derisive summary as tales "of wombs and cribs, diapers bepossed and the first long trousers, love's young dream and life's old lech, blood and tears and skin and bones and the tossing in the grave" (U 348). Here life is seen as a predictable list of increasingly unpleasant events and the stories which document such a life are implicated in this distasteful inevitability. The Unnamable discredits, distorts or ridicules any literature which comes to his attention especially his own. This is anti-creativity, undertaken for the sake of disillusionment. In form however, the Unnamable's narrative resembles the shifting spiel of a variety artist, with a contrived patter designed to alleviate his own boredom and that of his audience. The fact that the theatre, in the Unnamable's own metaphor, is empty and the voice indistinct only emphasises the inappropriateness of entertainment to the world in which the Unnamable finds himself.

At times the Unnamable seems to be treading the boards, juggling words and "playing Mahood" (U 326) but elsewhere he adopts a quite different *persona*: that of the prisoner, whose discourse is "perjury" (U 302). His narrative is criminal lies, but, paradoxically, he is condemned to utter it:

... they judge me from time to time ... this is my punishment, my crime is my punishment, that's what they judge me for, I expiate vilely, like a pig, dumb, uncomprehending, possessed of no utterance but theirs. They'll clap me in a dungeon ... (U 339).

A fantasy of liberation, couched in the tones of his imagined creator (the anonymous "I" who prompts the Unnamable's fraudulent "I") is equally legalistic: "you may go, you are free, you are acquitted, you are pardoned" (U 284). Other terms which suggest trials appear throughout the text. He calls certain hypotheses about the intentions of his narrator "Cases one and two" (U 286), he addresses his narrator as "your Lordship" (U 287), as though he were speaking to a judge. Later, a "proper authority" (U 340), perhaps this same narrator, will deliver a "verdict" on the Unnamable. Later still, the words and evidence of a legal advocate appear: "my dear man, come, be reasonable, look this is you, look at this photograph, and here's your file, no convictions" (U 347). However these allusions to the law are all extremely exaggerated. The Unnamable is not just constrained, or imprisoned, he is cast into a "dungeon", or locked up in an "oubliette" (U 339). Legalistic terms in *The Unnamable* have the quality of catch-cries. This makes them not so much straightforward images for the Unnamable's situation, as parodies of jargon which identify the Unnamable, formally, as an oppressed being. The Unnamable himself is not simply a metaphoric prisoner. His exaggerated servility ("your Lordship") and the clichéd terms of the acquittal which he imagines for himself, suggest that he is a caricature of the prisoner of debased popular fiction. Such parodic references to the law imply that a ridiculous system of power and punishment, well removed from actual justice, operates in the world of *The Unnamable*.

At the basis of the legalistic jargon in *The Unnamable* is a sense of guilt, which is also expressed in mock-theological terms. The Unnamable adopts the attributes of a demon, estranging himself from Christian forgiveness and ensuring his eternal damnation. He speaks, familiarly, of "the revolt of Lucifer" (U 271). He describes himself in terms which suggest hellfire - his eyes are "red as live coals" (U 276) and his tormentors will watch him "like a face in the embers" (U 281). His environment is, perhaps, a "strange hell" (U 330). His tormentors will have to "seize me by the horns" (U 349). His totem animals also suggest sorcery and defiance of God. He compares himself to an owl (U 361) - a bird which is traditionally associated with witchcraft - and, as Worm, he is like "a reptile" (U 329) "dragging its coils faintly away" (U 328) - which links him, like previous trilogy characters, with the serpent of Eden. All of these references, however, have a knowingly clichéd quality which suggests caricature of the hackneyed demonic images of cheap horror stories, rather than genuine Satanism. Nevertheless, such caricature alienates the Unnamable from a traditional source of peace, and when demonic imagery is used to describe the relationship between the Unnamable and his narrator the text itself is implicated in such alienation. Earlier in the text his "master" (U 286), that is his narrator, is called a "poor devil". This seemingly offhand sympathy is given literal expression later when the Unnamable tries to identify where the responsibility for his utterance lies:

... who can have come here, the devil perhaps, I can think of no one else, it's he showed me everything, here, in the dark, and how to speak, and what to say, and a little nature, and a few names, and the outside of men, those in my image, whom I might resemble, and their way of living, in rooms, in sheds, in caravans, in woods, or coming and going, I forget, and who went away and left me, knowing I was tempted, knowing I was lost ... (U 373)

So the Unnamable's creation does not take, as its model, the Genesis creation, it is instead merely fetishistic, inspired by the Devil and uttered by a lost soul. The creatures of the text are beyond

hope, and although the text itself may be bewitching (U 396) it is tainted with the rituals of sorcery.

The Unnamable directs his demonic malice at those Biblical texts which offer hope to the suffering. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is parodied with graphic emphasis on the anguish of the oppressed and with a complete denial of Christ's mercy: "He who seeks his true countenance, let him be of good cheer, he'll find it, convulsed with anguish, the eyes out on stalks. He who longs to have lived, while he was alive, let him be reassured, life will tell him how" (U 319). There are no blessings in the world of *The Unnamable*. His manifestation as vaudeville entertainer denies the value of his own narration, as a prisoner he is a complete victim, as a demon he is "lost" to the devil and damned.

In *Proust* Beckett writes that the genuine "artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction" (P 47). The trilogy contracts around the voice of its progressively denied narrator, casting off all that is extraneous to this voice and also discrediting the voice itself, so that the core of the contraction is acknowledged falsification. The reader who has witnessed the reductive parody of agents of compassion, reason, human concord and religious faith is left with the parodic discrediting of all that remains: the significance of the "I" speaker. Luigi Pirandello has commented on the consequences of incisive and honest creation, and this comment applies to Beckett's narrators, who are brutal in their honesty: "to look with new eyes, to express frankly, to recognise life is to project life once more in mystery. To make: to create, anew, from nothing: that nothing is felt again necessarily by all with greater strength".²⁸ Nothingness - a state of utter cancellation - is within the discredited narrative voice of the trilogy. In this work Beckett's artistic tendency contracts on emptiness.

28. Luigi Pirandello, "Theatre and Literature", in Haskell M. Block and Herman Salinger (eds), *The Creative Vision: Modern European Writers on Their Art*, New York, Grove Press Inc. (1960), p. 121.

CHAPTER VII

LATE WORKS

The texts which follow the trilogy show a tendency to recede into the conscious sparseness of contracted statement. This represents a movement toward fictional containment, involving minimal allusion to the world outside the text and, in some instances, the most bare reference possible to the subject of the text itself. Beckett's remark to Laurence E. Harvey, to the effect that "If you really get down to the disaster, the slightest eloquence becomes unbearable"¹ predicts the attempt to excise eloquence from his late expressions of artistic and existential "disaster". With a minimum of even the eloquence arising from ironic and direct contradiction, from the struggle with an inauthentic self, words and art and the striving for purpose which we find in *The Unnamable*, what is left is essential brevity in the service of narrative objectivity and observational truth. This attempted objectivity recalls Beckett's admiring description of Joyce as a man whose "detachment was complete. It was remarkable. Whether it was the fall of a leaf, or the fall of night, Joyce's detachment was total."² In certain of Beckett's late works a comparable detachment results in a reductive levelling, a flattening of all peaks of emotion or value. For example, the rotunda in *All Strange Away* is compared to "the Pantheon at Rome or certain beehive tombs" (A 28). All that these two structures have in common is a very essential correspondence of shape and an even more remote correspondence of religious function. However, Beckett links them as though the intricate triumph of Classical architectural engineering which is the Pantheon is on the same scale as the artifact which gives shelter and definition to the mortuary practices of a pre-civilised culture. This is comic incongruity, but it is also disparaging. Architecture shares the fate of literature, mathematics and philosophy in Beckett's reductive fiction. This levelling process, this withdrawal from distinguishing and evaluating represents rejection of the cognitive process of perception selection and interpretation. A similar rejection is to be found in Tom F. Driver's interview with Beckett, in which Beckett asks "What is more true than anything else? To swim is true, and to sink is true. One is not more true than the other." Strictly speaking, this is so, but we value one above the other. In his later fiction Beckett looks beyond such values to a region of detachment and approximate truth. In the (attempted) absence of judgement and evaluation we have simply observation, revealing the surface dimensions of indeterminate scenes or events.

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1. Samuel Beckett, quoted by Laurence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett and Critic*, p. 249.
 2. Samuel Beckett, quoted by Tom McGurk, "Mr Beckett and Mr Joyce", *Sydney Morning Herald* (June 19th, 1982), p.38.

Vision is limited, in both the ocular and the imaginative senses of the word. Such containment tends to reduce or exclude parody. Indeed the unusual nature of certain of these works has made them a target for parody. Brian H. Finney, in *Since How It Is*, describes:

The humorous parody of *Lessness* employed by the first correspondent to react to the appearance in print of this piece in the *New Statesman* who protested at 'this bloody awful madman's magma medly verbal gallimaufry crazy infantile artistic ragout',⁴

This illustrates the fact that the innovative and different is as vulnerable to parody as the excessive. The stylistic innovations in Beckett's later fiction, however vulnerable they are to criticism, result in a lowering of parodic content. However, a detailed analysis of parody and its related forms in three late works: "Texts for Nothing," *How It Is* and *Company* reveals that Beckett is still working with parody and parodic devices and that this usage is as reductive as in previous texts. Before embarking on such an analysis, a brief discussion of the remaining late works suggests the direction taken by parody in much of Beckett's late fiction.

In the remaining works which do contain parody, the device is peripheral rather than crucial to the central message of distress or detachment. Brief parodic phrases emphasise various attitudes of failure. In "From an Abandoned Work" (the title of which contains a pun - "abandoned" - on rejection and depravity) the narrator considers "the flowers of the field" (NK 139) immune from his aggressive impulses. The phrase is a slight distortion of the lilies of the field in the Sermon on the Mount. The reference reflects grimly on both the message of the original text and the condition of the narrator of the current text. Christ uses the image of the lilies to argue for the protective intentions of God, but the narrator of "From an Abandoned Work" is neither provided for nor protected (in fact - by his own account - vampire stoats attack him). A more lighthearted parodic phrase occurs in *Lessness*. When, in the staccato brevity of this work, a phrase as conventionally pretty as "the blue celeste of poesy" (L 13) occurs and is repeated the contrast between phrase and content suggests parodic mockery of such ornate - and celebratory - language. *Worstward Ho* contains an example of such brief parody at its most basic: with the inversion of an old cliché to read "For bad and all" (Wo 24) parodic distortion has reached its most reductive and compressed state.

3. Samuel Beckett, quoted by Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", *Colombia University Forum* V.4 (1961) pp. 22-3

4. Brian H. Finney, *Since How It Is*, London, Covent Garden Press (1972) p.35.

In contrast to such peripheral parody, *The Lost Ones* can be read as a sustained and very general parody of Dante's *Inferno*. The tale includes a direct reference to Dante, and the use of words such as "demon" (LO 19) and "abyss" (LO 14) to describe, respectively, an erroneous conviction and a defeated attitude, adds force to the association between the damned of the *Inferno* and Beckett's raw and restless masses. Moreover, the title suggests lost souls, just as the sulphurous light of the cylinder containing these lost ones suggests the traditional view of hell. However, Beckett's re-created *Inferno* re-shapes the original in a more modern and desperate form. Beckett's hell is utterly sealed and the tormented beings within are the victims of their own hopes. It is a hell without witness, guide or escape. Through this general parody of the *Inferno* Beckett presents a satiric view of the futility of human progression. "The Lost Ones" is, however, an exceptionally parodic work, within the context of Beckett's late fiction.

The first sentence of "Enough" : "All that goes before forget" (NK 153) is clearly ironic, since as far as this story is concerned, nothing has preceded this opening line. However, it can also be interpreted as a statement of the spirit of many of the short works in Beckett's late canon. Such works do not invite complex associations beyond the text at hand. Indeed, in "Closed Place" (the title suggests containment) we find a denial of allusion: "There is nothing but what is said. Beyond what is said is nothing" (F 49). In "Imagination Dead Imagine" the rotunda suggests that rotunda inhabited by Mahood's burlesque family in *The Unnamable*. However, the almost geometric precision of the description in "Imagine Dead Imagine" does not invite such a comparison. Similarly, the white bodies in "Ping" recall the white "dream animals" (NK 142) of "From an Abandoned Work". These are the creatures of the unconscious which the narrator finds purely and uniquely acceptable. But we do not need this association with the earlier text to identify the "Ping" beings as austere creatures of the imagination. The insignificance of previous texts is not absolute: the narrator of "From an Abandoned Work" describes himself lying prone and stickless, in imitation of the dying posture of Malone. Various references to landscape in this text also provide linkages to previous texts by Beckett, given the impression of common experiences variously recounted (which of course diminishes the authenticity of any single version). In "He is Bareheaded" we are told that "Murphy had first-rate legs" (F 27) - a surprising piece of information which establishes continuity between the early and late Beckett fictions. Such bridges are rare, however, as the tendency in Beckett's late works is more toward self-enclosure than playful cross-textual linkage.

Even the parody of first-person narration, refined and sustained in the trilogy, is diminished or absent in the later works. There is some consciousness of narrative ambiguity in "From an Abandoned Work" where the narrator tries to foist responsibility for his thoughts on to an anonymous over-narrator, and in "Old Earth" the "lies" (F 53) - presumably of fictional narrative - are rejected, but there are residual rather than central examples of narrative self-consciousness. Finally even first-person narration is superseded by clinical detachment. What remains in Beckett's fiction is a stated perception of deprivation. This is expressed in *Worstward Ho* through chains of words, as reductive as the gradually shrinking space which cramps about the creatures of "All Strange Away" : "Unmoreable unlesseable unworseable evermost almost void" (Wo 42-3). This is the shrinking fiction of desperate claustrophobia.

"Texts for Nothing"

"Texts for Nothing" uses the central motifs and dilemmas of its predecessors. At the outset the narrator seems to share the location and experiences of the narrators of "The Expelled," "The Calmative" and "The End". Later, echoes of the Trilogy predominate. Molloy and Malone are identified as "vulgar" and "common ... mortals" (NK 88) - which is ironic, given the consciously fictional status of these two narrator/characters. At one point the narrator of "Texts for Nothing" tries to talk himself into believing that he is musing in "the third-class waiting room of the South-Eastern Railway Terminus" (NK 104), which recalls the conclusive location of *Watt*. And just as Watt has a vision of himself in caricature, the current narrator caricatures previous Beckett creatures by describing their established uniform:

"I can just discern, with a final effort of will, a bowler hat which which seems to my sorrow a sardonic synthesis of all those that never fitted me and, at the other extremity, similarly suspicious, a complete pair of brown boots lacerated and gaping." (NK 110)

This "sardonic" costume (which offers neither comfort nor protection to the extremities of the mind and body) is rejected by the narrator. Empty ("vacant") but animated, the costume caricatures the studied nihilism of those who have worn it in previous Beckett works.

Caricature, which is a powerfully mocking device in Beckett's fiction from "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" on, is used with characteristic force in "Texts for Nothing".

The narrator anticipates evading his situation by taking the form of a child: "a kind of old tot...I'll be good, I'll sit quiet as a mouse in a corner and comb my beard, I'll tease it out, to look more bonny" (NK 82). His nurse "Bibby" will call him to sleep : "Come, doty, it's time for bye-bye". Alternatively, he might be a war veteran, reminiscing to a fellow-sufferer about battles and scars. The words of consolation which he imagines his friend uttering are almost as clichéd as Bibby's nursery talk : "Come on gunner, leave all that, think no more about it" (NK 84). The horribly cute mock-baby and the diseased old hero, passing agonising water past his swollen prostate (while his friend empties tubercular sputum in the public canal) are sickening caricatures of stereotypes of love (the baby) and honour (the veteran). It is significant that the narrator on both occasions imagines a benign companion for himself, but on each occasion the comfort offered by such a companion is clichéd and empty. The situation which the narrator is trying to avoid by projecting himself into such babyhood and old age is the situation of "the knowing non-exister" (NK 130) - the narrator who, like The Unnamable, is aware that when he says "I" another speaks. However the alternative to narrative inauthenticity is delusive and parodic comfort.

Just as in the Trilogy and the texts which immediately precede it, the condition of first-person narrator is parodied. On the one hand the narrator engages in seemingly believable self-description and reminiscence. However he contradicts this plausibility - and the conventional authority of the "I" voice - with remarks such as "all is false" (NK 81), "here there is no frankness" (NK 109) and "nothing can be told" (NK 123). He complains that he is helpless and manipulated, "a mere ventriloquist's dummy" (NK 109). First person narration is dismissed as the malicious imposition of a creator who "refuses to dignify me with the third person, like his other figments" (NK 88). This makes a mockery of our trust in the convention of genuine reportage which adheres to first person narration and it also insists on the parodic - that is, the inauthentically imitative - quality of the use of first person narration in the text at large.

At the same time as responsibility for the text is disclaimed, the narrator describes his creative compulsion in terms of conflict and exhaustion. This description is significant in that it defines the tormented relationship between narrator and character using caricatures which have been variously adopted during the course of "Texts for Nothing" : the popular stereotype of the judge, the scribe and the prisoner:

It's tiring, very tiring, in the same breath to win and lose, with concomitant emotions, one's heart is not of stone, to record the doom, don the black cap and collapse in the dock, very tiring in the long run, I'm tired of it, I'd be tired of it, if I were me. It's a game, it's getting to be a game, I'm going to rise and go, if it's not me it will be someone, a phantom, long live all our phantoms, those of the dead, those of the living and those of those who are not born. I'll follow him, with my sealed eyes, he needs no door, needs no thought, to issue from this imaginary head, mingle with air and earth and dissolve, little by little, in exile. Now I'm haunted, let them go, one by one, let the last desert me and leave me empty, empty and silent. It's they murmur my name, speak to me of me, speak of a me... Theirs all these voices, like a rattling of chains in my head, rattling to me that I have a head. That's where the court sits this evening, in the depths of that vaulty night, that's where I'm clerk and scribe, not understanding what I hear, not knowing what I write...Yes, one begins to be very tired, very tired of one's toil, very tired of one's quill, it falls, it's noted. (NK 94-5)

The creative process itself brings about the interplay of antagonistic ("win and lose") forces within the narrator. The negative aspect of this conflict receives symbolic expression in the striking image of the courtroom within the skull, with the narrator as accused, reinforcing a sense of existential guilt (characteristic of Beckett's fiction) and the prose as the product of his trial. At the same time the benefits which he suggests to be part of the process of artistic creation are shown to be illusory or impossible for him to grasp. One of these positives involves a projection of the narrator's own requirements on to the situation of the character whom he creates. For this character (unlike the narrator) there are no divisions or contradictions - it is possible for the product of the imagination to freely unite with air and earth and to gradually dissipate. It is not surprising that the seemingly helpless narrator should attempt to identify totally with the characters he creates, over whose existential situation he exercises some control. Unfortunately, this projection cannot fulfill the narrator's needs: he cannot unite his destiny with that of his characters, who "desert" him, leaving him "empty" - but not, as he claims, "silent". Moreover, his attempts to define his own existence through that of his characters (whose presence confirms that he has a head) and thereby achieve a firmer grasp of his own identity (which the comment "I'd be tired of it, if I were me" shows to be extremely tenuous) is not described in positive enough terms to convince us that it is a satisfactory compensation for the negative aspects of the creative process. Ultimately, the relationship between the narrator and his characters is defined in terms of mutual bondage, through the image of the characters rattling chains within the head of the narrator.

Finally the process of artistic creation is defined in all its futility as inconclusive: a process which continues beyond the exhaustion of the narrator and the failure of apparently essential equipment such as the quill.

How It Is

In his earlier work Beckett parodies, by mocking imitation, various narrative forms and literary precedents. In *How It Is* literary parody, especially of the conventions of first-person narration, exists, but the constructively fragmented form is original. The content consists of the imaginings of a being lying in a crucifix position in a sea of mud. The mud suggests waste and slaughter in the mud-bound battlefields of the Great War. However, a less specifically twentieth century interpretation is possible: in Genesis God creates man from dust, having made the dry earth fruitful with rain and flood. The world of *How It Is* is a sterile mixture of these divine creative materials in which a being lies in faithless imitation of the agony of Christ. In *How It Is* all hope of a fruitful encounter between man and his surroundings (including his fellows) is derided. In the process three main areas of traditional comfort are travestied: art, theology and philosophy.

The narrator of *How It Is* derides his artistic creation through scatological images: "I pissed and shat another image in my crib" (H11 9) and his very vehemence gives him a veneer of authenticity. So does the intense sensory reportage which he uses to describe life in the mud. At one point, too, he insists "my life we're talking of my life" (H11 129). However he is at pains to disclaim responsibility for the text which, he remarks throughout the work, is a quotation from an anonymous source: "an ancient voice in me not mine" (H11 7). A reminiscence is undercut by the statement, "I haven't been given memories" (H11 11). Theatrical, stagy images reinforce the impression that the narrator is an actor, pretending to be a narrator: other characters "have their part to play" (H11 52) and "the curtains parted" (H11 53, 57) on various scenes. This conscious falsification parodies the traditional reliability of the "I" speaker, who is revealed, in this text at least, as an externally manipulated liar. Other instances of narrative self-consciousness mock, condemn or denigrate art. The exaggeratedly picturesque language in which the springtime world of equally exaggeratedly pubescent lovers is described is mocked, not only by its own parodic excesses, but by the comment "very pretty only not like that it doesn't happen like that" (H11 32). The traditional notion of the transcendence of art is given grotesque form when Pim, the narrator's victim, responds to torture by singing: "when clawed in the armpit instead of crying he sings his song the song ascends" (H11 63).

In this music, the abstract art, is a response to the gougings of one's fellow traveller. Pim has both suffering and art. Words are equally unsatisfactory: Pim's identity is reduced to the slicing of the letters of his (externally imposed) name into his passive flesh. Toward the end of the text words distort as the interchangeability of names among victims and tormenters suggests that the significance of words is random and shifting. As in previous Beckett texts which explore the gap between words and meanings, this implies radical narrative unreliability. To add to this linguistic uncertainty, in *How It Is* names are a function of torture.

Theology is treated as iconoclastically as art. Down in the mud, the narrator prays to his provision sack, addressing it as "thou thou" (H11 17) and applying to it the terms of the ecclesiastical calendar - his sack is his "Lent", his "Hallowmas" (H11 17). This suggests that benediction in the world of *How It Is* takes the grossly materialist form of the tinned fish in the sack, which give the narrator sporadic physical nourishment. When the narrator describes disposing of the tins as "with the gesture...to be observed among certain sowers of seed I throw away the empty tins" (H11 11) he is parodying the parable of the sower. His mock-seeding of mud with litter reinforces the impossibility of strong positive growth in his world. When he speaks of misfortune as "one of those things that pass understanding" (H11 61) he is parodying the words of the Protestant benediction to suggest that divine cruelty is as mysterious as divine love. He mentions his solitary spiritual state in terms which suggest that he is a caricatured Adam and the tortured Pim as a caricatured Eve: "ah the soul I had in those days the euqinamity that's why they gave me a companion" (H11 25). If this vicious and passive relationship represents original humanity then existence is at best a dubious inheritance. At the same time the crawling narrator is reptilian - vulnerable to an impression of "loss of species" (H11 27). When Christ appears, he resembles a Sunday School illustration, and seems to have lost his power to redeem the sufferer from the corruption of the world:

raise the eyes look for faces in the sky animals in the sky fall asleep and there a beautiful youth meet a beautiful youth with golden goatee clad in an alb wake up in a sweat and have met Jesus in a dream . . .

image not for the eyes made of words not for the ears...(H11 45).

Dream images are no use in the world of the senses. All of these parodic and travestied theological references emphasise the absence or cruelty of God in the world of *How It Is*.

This world is also a "place without knowledge" (H11 123) in which philosophy is mocked. In *Murphy* the Cartesian mechanical body was given exaggeratedly literary form. In *How It Is* the same comic effect is exploited: "push pull the leg straightens the arm bends all these joints are working" (H11 19). This presents the body in an ungraceful light, but it is a comparatively benign mockery. John Fletcher describes a grimmer philosophical embodiment:

The infinite system of couples is, moreover, postulated in learned mockery of Leibniz...Leibniz' world of monads pre-established by a benign God is heavily parodied.⁵

In *How It Is* human entities are indeed windowless.

Mathematics is another delusive way of knowing in *How It Is*. At one point the narrator claims to have "always loved arithmetic it has paid me back in full" (H11 37). This amusingly neat equation is not, however, supported in the rest of the text, where mathematics may provide a cold - and increasingly sophisticated - analysis of the imagined chain of victims and tormenters, but it offers no satisfactory explanation for suffering. The calculations of the extent of distress and effort, punctuated by a pedantic, approving and ultimately ironical "correct" (H11 118) are finally condemned: "all these calculations yes explanations yes the whole story from beginning to end yes completely false yes" (H11 144). It is significant that such calculations are not condemned as a chillingly inappropriate way of describing misery, rather, their inadequacy irritates the narrator.

Within a carefully shattered form *How It Is* consciously shatters traditional areas of significance and hope. This iconoclastic tendency is not new in Beckett's fiction, but it has seldom been combined with such a grotesquely simplified yet graphically realised location.

Company

Company contains an analytic mock-narrator, a reminiscent voice and a helpless body. The characteristics of the supposed narrator's commentary are a preoccupation with authenticity, with what "can be verified" (C 8); the cancelling qualification of apparently significant statements; the inconclusive questioning of the situation which is being described and finally an admission that he himself is the creation of another.

5. John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 217.

Having called himself "W" (C 59) he remarks that "W too is creature. Figment" (C 63). These are reductive narrative techniques which, as we have seen, are common in Beckett's previous fiction. As in earlier works the denial of narrative authority, when combined with statements and descriptions which require of the reader an acceptance of such authority, confers a parodic quality on such statements and descriptions.

The reminiscent voice in *Company* describes incidents in the childhood and old age of an individual. Perhaps the past of the helpless but conscious body is under scrutiny. There incidents include the child's rejection (by his mother); his father's self-imposed exile from the house in which he is being born; his own wanderings on foot as an elderly man (which do not seem to add up to anything); again as a child, his charitable gesture in opening a gate for an excluded beggar; a moment, apparently of fear, before his first dive into water; a game of diving through the boughs of a tree, for which he is reprimanded; the death of a neglected pet; walking in a winter landscape; a moment of estrangement from his parents; a (presumably) adolescent embrace and (perhaps as an old man) a walk by the sea. For the most part, these anecdotes and remembered fragments describe rejection, dismay, exclusion, isolation or fear. At the same time it is hinted that they are inauthentic - one reminiscence is called a "stretch of imagining" (C 59), which identifies it as fabricated. The individual to whom these events may have occurred is too passive to confirm or verify their truth, he is too passive even to "brush away a fly" (C 38). He is merely a helpless recipient of false memories. These anecdotes, then, constitute parodic biography, since they are not the genuine memories which they purport to be, and in any case their auditor is beyond the assessment of their veracity. Kateryna Arthur has suggested that *Company* is a parody of D  irdre Bair's biography of Samuel Beckett.⁶ Indeed there are remarkable parallels between the texts. Kateryna Arthur pointed out the resemblance between the following descriptions:

You climb to near the top of a great fir. You sit a little listening to all the sounds. Then throw yourself off. The great boughs break your fall. The needles. You lie a little with your face to the ground. Then climb the tree again. (C 28).

6. This was a verbal comment made at the conference on The European Imagination at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, 1982. Kateryna Arthur gave permission for its use in this thesis.

One of Sam's favourite games was to climb to the top of one of the pine trees that towered over the house and to throw himself down, arms and legs spread-eagled, willing himself to fly, until the very end of his free fall, when he hoped fervently that one of the broad lower branches would stop him before he slammed into the ground.⁷

Although Samuel Beckett assured Deirdre Bair that "he would not read the book before or after it appeared"⁸ it is at least possible that he has scanned his own biography. It is impossible to judge whether similar passages like those above result from a conscious attempt at close parody, or whether Deirdre Bair accurately depicts several incidents which have occurred in Beckett's life, and such events co-incidentally found their way into his fiction. If Beckett is parodying the Bair biography in *Company*, he represents it as false reminiscence imposed on a helpless victim. However it is not necessary to make a specific connection between Deirdre Bair's work and *Company* in order to argue for the parodic nature of the imaginative memories in *Company*. Within *Company* itself it is implied that they are fabrications and this inauthenticity mocks the conventions of biographical narrative.

In the final part of *Company* the putative narrator, the voice and the body are drawn into a single identity, a reptilian creature, crawling like the narrator of *How It Is*, and imagining a myth, the "fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark" (C 89) in a vain attempt to alleviate his isolation. His division suggests mutually unfulfilled elements of the self: the questioning explicator who cannot, with any surety, make sense of his situation; the fabricated memory; and the body, passive but not relaxed. Parody results from the conscious inauthenticity of narration in *Company*.

This selective analysis of Beckett's late works demonstrates both change and continuity. Certain works are exercises in a detachment which is far from the laconic or vehement invective of the Trilogy. A constant element in Beckett's fiction is the description of existence as universally unfortunate. This arises from wholesale existential inappropriateness: the hostile environment; the unfitness of various components of the psyche; and the conflict between creator and art. Everything is simply wrong. In certain of the later works parody is used to focus and intensify this sense of wrongness.

7. Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett : A Biography*, p.15.

8. *ibid.*, p. xii

The chapters which form the core of this thesis assess the function of parody in Beckett's fiction from teasing, playful mockery in "*Che Sciagura*" to the "Unmoreable unlesable unworseable evermost almost void" (Wo 42-3) prose of *Worstward Ho*. Such an assessment leads to the conclusion that parody and related devices combine with a narrative self-consciousness (which is, in its most extreme form, a narrative denial) and a kind of choking humour to invalidate any expression of human comfort. Thought and knowledge fail to give insight; the social world is antagonistic; faith is empty and theology means condemnation. Caricature deprives characters of authenticity at the same time as the texts which house them are denied the traditional literary function of mirrors to the organic world. Moreover, the prose contributes to the fragmentation of its avowed creator: language is denied its communicative value and narrative is the product of a cruel and insatiable compulsion. Despite the satisfaction which Beckett's narrators may experience through parodic denigration, this mockery ultimately serves only to reinforce an impression of psychic and artistic fragmentation. The following chapter completes this analysis of the function of parody and its related devices in Beckett's desperate (and at times desperately funny) fiction by considering the parodic exposition of another form of social and creative estrangement: the isolation from one another of men, women and children.

SECTION III

SHEATH WITHIN SHEATH AND THE MISSING SWORD

Gender Division and the Rejection of Organic Creation

*Everything about woman is a riddle,
and everything about woman has one
solution: pregnancy.*

Nietzsche

*Threatening punishment, Awa and the
whole council of women forbade me ever
again to draw pictures of a flounder
caught in an eel trap. Nevertheless,
I kept doing so in secret. For, much
that I had learned to dread the withholding
of the breast that suckled me thrice daily,
the Flounder was stronger, especially since
he spoke to me whenever I wished: I had
only to cry out "Flounder, Flounder".
"All she wants", he said, "is constant
self-affirmation. Everything outside of
her is ruled out. But art, my son,
refuses to be ruled out."*

Günter Grass

CHAPTER VIII

GENDER DIVISION AND THE REJECTION OF ORGANIC CREATION

The previous chapters have demonstrated that in the world which Beckett's fiction projects, intellectual creativity in the form of art or epistemology is fruitless and ultimately without value. This is suggested by the parodic discrediting of intellectual creativity. There is a corresponding parodic discrediting of organic creativity in Beckett's fiction. Travesties, parodies and caricatures which take as their targets either women characters, or literary genres in which love achieves apotheosis, or ideals associated with femininity, show that concord between the sexes and biological reproduction are just as grotesquely inadequate as systems of reasoning and literature. The disintegrative function of parody establishes an estrangement between genders and a denial of life's continuity. Moreover, this extends, in the trilogy especially, to a rejection of the human species. Watt's loss of faith in language leads to a "loss of species" (*W* 82), which leaves him in a limbo of isolation. The trilogy narrators, as we have seen, associate themselves with reptiles. This both establishes their relationship to the defiant and persuasive serpent of Eden - the decreed enemy of women in the world after the Fall - and represents a rejection of the human species. The Unnamable, in a parodically mock-instructive lesson to his character Mahood (who later becomes the reptilian character Worm) rejects the human species and the lactating function which defines humanity as mammalian:

Pupil Mahood, repeat after me, Man is a higher mammal, I couldn't. Always talking about mammals, in this menagerie. ... I'll have my bellyful of mammals, I can see that from here, before I wake. Quick, give me a mother and let me suck her white, pinching my tits. (*U* 309-310)

Here, the Unnamable sets himself up as an alternative to the biological method of procreation. He is a travesty of motherhood: pregnant with fictional mammals ("bellyful"). He would like to vitally drain a mother, that is, an organic creator. Such animosity towards human increase, mothers and female lovers (who are potential

mothers) is life-negating, just as so much of Beckett's parody negates civilisation - that is, coherent and authentic language, mathematics, art and thought. This chapter introduces the problem of biological increase in Beckett with a general discussion of the position of women (who are, for the most part the opposite gender to his narrators) in his fiction. Then salacious humour, which contributes extensively to the denial of procreation, is analysed. With these discussions as background, examples of parody (and related forms) which ridicule affected women and sentimentality are considered as evidence of the continuing disintegrative and reductive function of parody in Beckett's fiction.

From the outset a certain kind of femininity has been presented as potentially destructive in Beckett's fiction. In "Assumption",¹ the first piece of fiction which Beckett published, a woman appears as vampire and parasite. She is both a banal admirer of the work of the male artist who is the central character in the story, and a kind of sinister muse: a stimulator and consumer of the masculine psyche. However, she does not appear in the beginning of the story. The first few pages characterise the male artist and his dilemmas. These opening paragraphs are filled with elliptical, recondite and somewhat pompous observations on the nature of art. Even at this early stage, art - and male created art at that - is the primary subject of Beckett's fiction. The artist is profoundly disturbed by the qualities of silence, of articulation and listening. He is unable to balance and resolve withdrawal, creation and general passivity. He is deeply afraid of his artistic voice, afraid that a destructive loss of integrity will result from creation. At the same time he pities the work which is struggling, through him, for expression. He copes with this conflict by attempting a complete withdrawal, retreating from conversation and the world at large into the silence of his room. He is visited by a "Woman" - the

1. Samuel Beckett, "Assumption", *Transition Workshop*, pp. 41-44.

capital letter and generic designation suggesting that she is more than an individual, that she is the quintessence of femaleness. For the artist, her visit is a radical intrusion. She fractures his concentration:

He clenched his hands in a fury against the enormous impertinence of women, their noisy, intrusive, curious enthusiasm, like the spontaneous expression of admiration bursting from American hearts before Michaelangelo's tomb in Santa Croce.

His peevish irritation seems very funny, although it is probably intended to be received in all seriousness by the reader. (Beckett had not, at this stage, refined his later technique of ironically counterpointing every significant statement with humour.) Her presence is compared to "an irruption of demons". (In *First Love* and the trilogy, as we shall see, women are associated with evil, with negative witchcraft.) She has desecrated his sanctuary. She is sensual and mysterious, her eyes are "pools of obscurity". He finds her fascinatingly destructive. She seems to bleed him of his essence, to rob him of the ability to suppress his feared artistic voice, to weaken his guard against "dissolution". Finally, in a climax which is physical and spiritual, as well as artistic, he pours out his being, "torn and battered" and longing for the loss of individuality against which he had so carefully defended himself. He dies, screaming, under the gaze of the woman who has made him so vulnerable. But this cry is an expression of suppressed creativity. The woman is "swept away" by its force. Primal and chaotic, it becomes one with the sounds of nature, of "forest" and "sea". So in this story sexuality, death, creativity, chaos and femininity are closely associated. In Beckett's later fiction certain women are seen as dangerously overwhelming, as likely in some sense to consume the masculine character or narrator.

A less threatening, and very funny, example of the consuming woman occurs in *Watt*, with the portrait of Mary the compulsive eater:

She was not a woman to confide. And indeed I think I am correct in saying that she was opposed to conversation on principle as such. Whole days, and even entire weeks, would glide away without Mary's having opened her gob for any purpose other than the reception of her five fingers fastened firmly on a fragment of food ...

I see her still, propped up in a kind of stupor against one of the walls in which this wretched edifice abounds, her long grey greasy hair framing in its cowl of scrofulous mats a face where pallor, languor, hunger, acne, recent dirt, immemorial chagrin and surplus hair seemed to dispute the mastery. Flitters of perforated starch entwine an ear. Under the rusty cotton frock, plentifully embossed with scabs of slobber, two cup-like depressions mark the place of the bosom and a conical protuberance that of the abdomen. (W 50, 53).

It is significant that Mary is "opposed to conversation" - words, the tools of Beckett's masculine artists, have no place in her existence. Although Mary is not described in attractive terms, no real hostility is directed against her. This is perhaps because she is barren: her breasts are concave, she offers nothing to the external world and posits no threat to the narrator, Arsene. Her sterility is entire, the food does not contribute to her physical or emotional well-being and so she is not enriched, even on a biological level, by her consumption. Although Arsene is curious about her thoughts, all that he can say with any certainty is that Mary is an eating-machine. Beckett's Mary is a travesty of the *Maria-Ecclesia*, the *mater omnium*. Leo Steinberg mentions the "difficult theological concept" of the *Maria-Ecclesia*: "the Virgin in labour on Calvary". This creed situates Mary in "perpetual parturition; labouring at the foot of the cross as she gives birth to the mystic body of Christ which is the Church".² The original Mary is endlessly giving, open and fruitful, nurturing all of humanity under the shadow of suffering and death. Beckett's Mary

2. Leo Steinberg, in Jean Lipman and Richard Marshall (eds), *Art About Art*, New York, E.P. Dutton in Assoc. with The Whitney Museum of American Art (1978), p. 30.

is entirely closed to the world outside herself, absorbing everything edible in her environment into her unknowable interior.

A more sinister version of the consuming female occurs in *Mercier and Camier*. Mercier, who has, earlier in the novel, been refreshed by the sight of an old woman bleeding in the gutter after having been hit by a car, speaks of his marriage, wife and children in characteristically vitriolic terms. At the same time he hints at the fear of female ingestion:

... Toffana. The mother of my children. Mine own. Inalienable. Toffana. You never met her. She lives on. A tundish. Like fucking a quag. To think that it was for this hectolitre of excrement I renegued my dearest dream. He paused conquettishly. But Camier was in no playful mood. So that Mercier resumed perforce, You are shy to ask me which. Then let me whisper it in your ear. That of leaving the species to get on as best it could without me. (MC 84)

In this, sterility is presented as an ideal. The scatological reference, as we shall see, is common in Beckett's fiction on the subject of women and sex. But it is Toffana's swampiness, disturbing in its carnal explicitness, which is especially revealing. Later in the novel, during a description of moorland, the qualities of swamp are directly pointed out: "the quag allures, with an allurements not all mortals can resist. Then it swallows them up or the mist comes down" (MC 97). Toffana is associated with the earth in a treacherous and unstable form: the strangely appealing quag which consumes its victims or veils them in obscurity. The connection becomes comprehensible in a more general sense when it is considered in the light of Jungian psychoanalytic theory.³ Toffana's identification with a stagnant, as opposed to fecund, combination of earth and water links her with the negative side of the female principle, the side which is associated with the earth as the grave,

3. Beckett's familiarity with the work of Jung has been established by Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, pp. 177-178, 208-210.

with death on a physical or psychic level. Erich Neumann, in *The Great Mother*, writes of

... the Terrible Devouring Mother, whose psyche attraction is so great because of its energetic charge that the charge of the ego complex, unable to withstand it, "sinks" and is "swallowed up".⁴

Whether or not we accept that the human psyche, like an electrical circuit, has a certain "charge" which may be lost when confronted with a negative archetype, or indeed whether or not we have reservations about the notion of archetypes itself, Neumann's description of the Terrible Devouring Mother summarises the fear of subjugation and loss of the self through contact with the feminine which we find in much of Beckett's fiction.

Mercier may have further reason to be hostile toward his wife, Toffana. "Toffana" - an unusual name in the Irish context of *Mercier and Camier* - is, however, similar to "Tophania". Tophania was the name of a female poisoner who sold her concoction, popularly known as *Acqua Toffnina*, during the eighteenth century in Naples. Her clients seem for the main part to have been disgruntled wives. The poison itself was a dilute arsenic solution. Administered gradually, it had the effect of accelerating the ageing process, so that the victim and his allies were unlikely to suspect that he was dying from unnatural causes.⁵ The association of Toffana with a Neapolitan poisoner has extremely sinister implications for Mercier. Women in Beckett's fiction are the custodians of both birth and death (through the feminisation of the grave). The narrator of *First Love* writes of "how tender the earth can be ... and how many graves in her giving, for the living" (FL 60). If women are also capable of effecting unnatural debilitation in their men, then men are profoundly threatened. Annihilation may be

4. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Princeton New Jersey, Princeton University Press (1974), p. 27.

5. The information on Tophania appears in Charles Mackay, *Selections from Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, London, Unwin Books (1973), pp. 52-58.

positive in the eyes of Beckett's narrators, but enforced annihilation at the hands of an alien gender is not a happy prospect.

As we have seen, Molloy and Moran suspect Lousse and Martha of actual or intended poisonings. As poisoners, Lousse and Martha threaten what limited control Molloy and Moran have over their circumstances and identities. This involvement with threatening intoxication associates them, in Jungian terms, with the Terrible Mother archetype.

In *First Love*, Lulu, though not a poisoner, is linked with witchcraft. She is intuitive and perceptive, making sense of the narrator's mutterings into his overcoat collar. She sings "strange" little songs to herself. She is associated, in the narrator's mind, with "faggot and fire" (FL 26). When he finds himself "tracing her name in old cowshit ... with my devil's finger" (FL 33) this associates both Lulu and love itself with sorcery. Indeed the narrator regards the experience of love as a kind of occult possession: "one is no longer oneself" (FL 24) when one has an erection, and "what goes by the name of love is banishment" (FL 24) presumably, from the self. Self-estrangement and powerlessness result from love and prolonged contact with women.

Lousse, Martha and Lulu exhibit characteristics of the Terrible Mother archetype. Erich Neumann tells us that the Terrible Mother is manifested in flux and change, in the seasonal progression from bounteous summer to winter, in the personal transition from life and health to disease and death. In *Proust* Beckett explicitly identifies change and decay with a negative female principle:

And the Goddess who requires ... sacrifice and ... humiliation, whose sole condition of patronage is corruptibility, and into whose faith and worship all mankind is born, is the Goddess of Time. (P 40-41)

The personification of Time as a venal and demanding goddess has ramifications for Beckett's own fiction. Beckett's female characters

often combine mystery and numinosity with intense physicality. So Molloy's mother is both a stupid filthy incontinent hag and, in the abstract, the obscure goal of his quest. But as numinous figures, the women in Beckett's fiction are never beneficent. Like the Time Goddess, they give nothing beyond decay and the death of unfulfilled hope.

However, it would be false to suggest that Beckett's fiction is without sympathy for individual women, or that women are presented in a wholly negative light. It does not fall within the scope of this thesis to consider Beckett's theatrical characterisation. But the plays are rich in positive and fully realised female characters who find themselves in grotesque and poignant situations: Winnie, with her perennial and forced optimism,⁶ the irrepressible Maddy Rooney⁷ and the self-effacing and verbally stumbling narrator of *Not I*.⁸ Some of Beckett's female characters, such as Celia in *Murphy* and Helen in *Mercier and Camier*, are unthreatening, nurturing, patient and generous in their interaction with male characters. It is not women whom Beckett attacks so much as the illusion (as he presents it) of accord between the sexes, and the progenerative function of women which is derided just as the literary creation of the male characters is ridiculed.

The only sustained female narrative voice in Beckett's fiction celebrates complete female acquiescence, but while the narrator is nostalgic about her experience of apparently joyful self-abnegation, such indulgence in self-denial is so absolute that it seems to be ironic self-betrayal, which reinforces the impossibility of equal and harmonious relations between men and women. In Beckett's prose piece "Enough" the specifically feminine narrator reminisces about a relationship in which she was totally compliant. The man

6. Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days : A Play in Two Acts*, London, Faber and Faber (1966).

7. Samuel Beckett, *All That Fall : A Play for Radio*, London, Faber and Faber (1957).

8. Samuel Beckett, *Not I*, London, Faber and Faber (1973).

appears to be the usual male Beckett character: ancient, shabby, capable of only the most awkward movement. The liaison begins when the narrator is a child of six. She follows him in his travels - or rather walks beside him, crouching because of his stoop. She listens and responds. She remembers their travels as a time of perpetual spring, warm and raining. Rather sentimentally, she tells us that they subsisted on flowers which grew at their feet. The story concludes with a display of the control which Beckett's narrators exercise - or attempt to exercise - over their subjects, and with a suggestion of the evocative power of art when it is used as an instrument of recall:

I'll wipe out everything but the flowers. No more rain. No more mounds. Nothing but the two of us dragging through the flowers. Enough my old breasts feel his old hand. (NK 159)

"Enough" carries a double meaning - on the one hand it signals the end of the description, on the other, it suggests that the description is sufficient to bring back vivid and tactile memories. The narrator is an extreme example of a positive, nurturing woman. However, she is not fecund. The only explicit sexual reference is to a sterile (biologically speaking) oral encounter and she begins her association with this man as a pre-pubescent child.

Celia, Helen and the narrator of "Enough" are exceptionally positive women in Beckett's fiction. Those women who give birth (or seem likely to do so) and therefore perpetuate life are often vilified and condemned. The antidote for fecundity or sentimentality in Beckett's fiction seems to be comic mockery. Much of this ridicule is parodic, but before considering in detail the reductive function of such parodies in Beckett's fiction, general comic ridicule will be discussed.

In general, sex is an especially vulnerable topic for lampooning. L.J. Potts attributes the popularity of sexual humour to the comic ridiculousness of the act itself: "the favourite topic of comedy is sex ... nowhere else can we all be said to be eccentric". Physiological differences between the sexes are, he suggests, in themselves absurd: "all women appear abnormal to all men".⁹ Beckett exploits, with comic effect, the incongruity between the halves of the human race, and at the same time ridicules methods - such as sexual, romantic or verbal communication - of bridging the gap. However, when humour fades from descriptions of love and coupling - as is the case in *How It Is*, where the narrator recounts the way in which his wife, Pam Prim (!) slipped or jumped out of a window, perhaps in response to his attempts at buggery - the reader is left with the impression of great sadness. This suggests that although sex and love are easy targets for derisive humour in Beckett's fiction, the salacious humour is not gratuitous: beyond comic effect, the problem of sexual communication perplexes the characters and this perplexity is expressed in their narratives. So we can say that humour about sex in Beckett's fiction is usually very explicit, but this directness, far from being an indulgence in lurid humour for the sake of quick comic and shock effect, points to an area of very real difficulty for Beckett's male characters and narrators.

Sexual communication is viewed very negatively in Beckett's fiction. It is the concrete expression of "that desert of loneliness and recrimination that men call love" (P 38). When Molloy finds himself in a dead-end street, filled with old newspapers, garbage, and excrement, he decides that "here lovers must have lain at night and exchanged their vows" (Mo 57). Molloy's idea of a lovers' bower is incongruously funny. But the implication is that

9. L.J. Potts, *Comedy*, London, Hutchinson University Library (1966), p. 45.

human beings come together in a wrack of stinking flotsam, in a venue from which there is but one escape, and try to create for one another the illusion of promise. Molloy tells us that when he was younger by about seventy years he was only capable of loving old men - roughly of the type whom he later resembles, although he does not make this connection explicitly. At the time of creating his narrative his hands, from which he feels curiously detached, simulate copulation on the sheets before him. In *Murphy*, too, "the friendship of a pair of hands ... clasping and unclasping" (*M* 11) is mentioned. It seems that the only enduring love in Beckett's fiction is self-love, which, given the confused state of the self, carries its own weight of complication and inadequacy. But it is the only kind of affection which consistently produces a small amount of comfort, as the narrator of *Texts for Nothing* suggests when he hugs himself to sleep: "I'm in my arms ... without much tenderness, but faithfully, faithfully" (*NK* 75). The failure of positive communication between men and women and the hopelessness of biological reproduction is revealed through Beckett's distortion and inversion of a major comic tradition.

This comic tradition celebrates the power and continuity of the life-force. It probably began in phallic festivals and orgiastic rituals connected with the necessity to influence the fertility of crops, livestock and people through sympathetic magic rituals. James Feibleman locates the origins of theatrical comedy in "phallic processions" and "fertility drama".¹⁰ In this tradition the most ancient and durable comic conventions are grounded - those conventions such as clowning which are based more on physical, gymnastic skill than on wordplay. Farce and slapstick characters, who pop up unscathed after devastating blows and calamities, can be seen as manifestations of the regenerative tradition in comedy.

10. James Feibleman, *In Praise of Comedy: A Study in Its Theory and Practice*, pp. 25-27.

Language may be turned to the purpose of invective, or may be salacious - in which case the emphasis on physicality and lust highlights the importance of fertility and regeneration. The kind of humour which takes human appetite as its subject, involving greed, the scatological and the sexual, also (by exaggeration and exuberance) emphasises fullness and plenty. Mikhail Bakhtin calls this comedy of the physical "grotesque realism" and establishes its opposition to the intellectual or ethereal:

The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.¹¹

Grotesque realism is carnal and affirmative:

The very material bodily lower stratum of the grotesque image (food, wine, the genital force, the organs of the body) bears a deeply positive character ... the final result is always abundance, increase.¹²

Bakhtin is specifically discussing medieval festive comedy here, but certain critics who have taken a more general approach to the subject of comedy regard this positive, regenerative principle as its very basis. Wylie Sypher, for example, considers comedy to be a ritualistic "carrying away of Death, a triumph over mortality by some absurd faith in rebirth, restoration and salvation".¹³

Susanne Langer points out that:

comedy is an art form that arises naturally wherever people are gathered to celebrate life, in spring festivals, triumphs, birthdays, weddings or invitations.

11. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Cambridge (Mass.), The M.I.T. Press (1968), pp. 19-20.

12. Mikhail Bakhtin, *ibid.*, p. 62.

13. Wylie Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy", in Robert W. Corrigan (ed.), *Comedy Meaning and Form*, San Francisco, Chandler Publishing Co. (1975), p. 37.

She concludes that "the pure sense of life is the underlying feeling of comedy" and that the comic character is "the personified *élan vital*".¹⁴ Generalisations about the essence of *all* comedy are bound to be vulnerable. However, a certain type of humour does implicitly emphasise human continuity. In this milieu, nothing can be static: comedy expresses itself through scatological humour, in which the hunger for food leads inevitably to excretion, and through sexual humour, in which the hunger for sensual pleasure leads to childbirth. It is the comedy of consumption, synthesis and elimination, the comedy of change and progression.

In Beckett's fiction, individuals make up "a procession advancing, in jerks or spasms, like shit in the guts" (*HII* 124) and a feminine principle, as dangerous as the female snake in the poem "Serena I" which digests a rat in a "storm of peristalsis" (*CP* 21), encloses this infinite human progression. A sense of human continuity - similar to that which has been seen as the very basis of comedy - informs most of Beckett's fiction. The most obvious manifestation of this continuity is Beckett's (implicitly) endless chain of narrators. This sense of continuity is also strong in his salacious humour; but far from being a celebration of the life-force (in Langer's terms), the comic tradition is inverted and perpetual change and progression is seen to be profoundly regrettable.

In "The Calmative" the narrator describes the reaction of an audience to the anecdote of a comedian who is clearly working in the comic regenerative tradition. The narrator establishes his alienation from this kind of humour:

What I saw was a bald man in a brown suit, a comedian.
He was telling a funny story about a fiasco. Its
point escaped me. He used the word snail, or slug,
to the delight of all present. The women seemed even

14. Susanne Langer, "The Comic Rhythm", in Robert W. Corrigan (ed.), *Comedy Meaning and Form*, p. 124.

more entertained than their escorts, if that were possible. Their shrill laughter pierced the clapping and, when this had subsided, broke out still here and there in sudden peals even after the next story had begun, so that part of it was lost. Perhaps they had in mind the reigning penis sitting who knows by their side and from that sweet shore launched their cries of joy towards the comic vast ... (NK 27)

What is being observed here is Bakhtin's comedy of grotesque realism. The phallic connotations of "snail, or slug" identify this as priapic humour, the kind of humour which reduces a subject to the physical, which plays on carnal appetite. The women (physiologically central to human regeneration) respond most gleefully to the anecdote; possibly, the narrator tells us, aware of some symbolic and singular "reigning penis" in their midst. Their laughter obliterates the next story. As in the early story "Assumption", if masculine creativity is to be sustained, women must be excluded. The women in this audience seem to find the otherness of men a subject for unifying laughter, whereas our narrator, physically part of the crowd, is emotionally incapable of sharing their humour. The "point" of the spiel escapes him because this type of humour aims for simple delight in the contradictions of the physical rather than cerebral instruction or play. Unequivocal enjoyment is not an emotion which the narrator allows himself to experience. Furthermore, the kind of humour which celebrates the differences between the sexes and implicitly points to the continuity of existence through future generations is likely to leave him cold, since he finds contradiction puzzling and, like most of Beckett's characters, he is to some extent fixated on his unique selfhood.

In *The Unnamable* the narrator subtly acknowledges the significance of one manifestation of the regenerative comic tradition. He uses the Punch and Judy show as an image of his own existence - an existence featuring attempted escapes from the compulsion to describe direct experience. These escapes take the form of self-conscious digression into fantasy and incomplete

identification with his imagined character. The nature of one of these characters, Worm, is open to many interpretations, but on one level he has obvious phallic connotations - reinforced by the description of his single eye "a little raw ... with the pissing" (U 341). Through Worm, the narrator hopes to achieve oblivion:

... what can I say of Worm, who hasn't the wit to make himself plain, what to still this gnawing of termites in my Punch and Judy box ... (U 311)

For the narrator, the description of Worm may lead to stillness. But the opposite of the state of total cessation for which the narrator strains is his babbled monologue, continually undermined from within, like a crumbling stage for the puppets who are his characters. Worm is implicitly an actor in The Unnamable's Punch and Judy show, and a potential vehicle for The Unnamable's escape from the entire scenario of manipulated puppets. Punch himself corresponds in some ways to The Unnamable's characters and to other characters in Beckett's fiction. Punch is a kind of comic psychopath, killing his child, his wife and a succession of stereotypical characters before slipping his hangman up in his own noose and escaping. Depending upon the version of the tale, he may also destroy the Devil himself.¹⁵ So the Punch story is basically about survival and the crushing of adversaries, about comic irresponsibility and the triumph of the individual in whom the life-force is strong. As such, it fits into the broad framework of life-affirmative comic tradition under discussion. Like Punch, The Unnamable's characters are emphatically masculine, slippery and tenacious, although their capacity for violence is limited by their immobility: Mahood is crippled and finally deprived of arms and legs, Worm is like a blob of protoplasm, the diverting character in his most raw and malleable form. Worm and Mahood and

15. This plot summary is based on the Punch and Judy entry in Phyllis Hartnell (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, London, Oxford University Press (1967), pp. 772-774.

the Unnamable himself are survivors, like Punch. The earlier narrators in the trilogy, whom The Unnamable (as we have seen) either implicitly or directly claims to have created, also exhibit the characteristics of Punch. Molloy brutally bashes a kindly charcoal-burner into unconsciousness. Molloy's response is so viciously disproportionate to the incident described that it is comical. A similar comic principle of exaggerated violence operates when Moran beats a stranger who obstructs him. As he says later in his report: "when a thing resists me, even if it is for my own good, it does not resist me long" (*Mo* 152). It is Moran, too, who asserts the inexhaustibility and intensity of the life-force:

With time, and nothing but my teeth and nails, I
would rage up from the bowels of the earth to its
crust, knowing full well I had nothing to gain.
And when I had no more teeth, no more nails, I
would dig through the rock with my bones. (*Mo* 144)

This illustrates both vigour and futility. At the conclusion of *Malone Dies* Malone has Lemuel, the psychiatric nurse in the Macmann story, swiftly murder the group who have treated his charges to a picnic: "Lemuel released Macmann, went up behind Maurice who was sitting on a stone filling his pipe and killed him with the hatchet. We're getting on, getting on" (*MD* 263). The final sentence, an authorial intrusion, suggests that the slaughter is artistically expedient for Malone himself, anxious as he is to finish the story. So both Lemuel and his creator, Malone, are Punch figures. Frenzied irritation and violent self-assertion mark all of these incidents, but the Beckett characters, unlike Punch, are not victorious over their circumstances. They may knock down their tangible enemies in a comic excess of violence, but their real enemies do not exist on a material plane. Bashing an obstacle ceases to be a solution when the obstacle comes from within the self.

Beckett's narrators are working within the scenario of grotesque realism, of life-affirmative comedy in which situations are reduced to a physical level and any pretensions to spiritual transcendence or ecstasy are ironically undercut. But like "The Calmative" narrator, who is within a crowd but clearly not a member of the group, all of Beckett's narrators who use this grotesque realism are operating within a tradition with which they are not entirely in accord. In their fantasies the physical is emphasised, but ultimately it is denigrated rather than celebrated. This is supremely evident in their attitude to women, sex and reproduction.

In Beckett's fiction the amusing salacious element - which conventionally would imply positive regeneration - takes the form of descriptions of love-making which violate our aesthetic preconceptions. Beckett's lovers are ancient and awkward and their practical difficulties are pointed out in vivid detail. Implicit in the descriptions of these couplings is a preoccupation with the futility of existence. This attitude is expressed in its most raw and strident form in an incident in *Mercier and Camier*, in which Watt violently disrupts a bar, shouting "Fuck life!" (MC 118). As the double expletive suggests, sex is inseparable from, and fundamental to, existence. The narrator of *First Love*, who is something of a necrophile, extends this when describing his reverie in a cemetery:

The smell of corpses, distinctly perceptible under those of grass and humus mingled, I do not find unpleasant, a trifle on the sweet side perhaps, a trifle heady, but how infinitely preferable to what the living emit, their feet, teeth, armpits, arses, sticky foreskins and frustrated ovules. (FL 9)

For him, existence is ultimately reducible to the genital and reproductive areas, and existence is accordingly rejected in favour of death. Due to a revulsion from life, Beckett's narrators undermine rather than reinforce a sense of imminent fertility and

positive human increase in their descriptions of love and sex. The couplings which are described in Beckett's fiction are generally barren. When pregnancy is suggested the parturition may be denied by the narrator. So Malone, who dismisses his character Moll with the remark that "our concern here is not with Moll, who after all is only a female" (MD 241), subsequently causes her to die. As Dieter Wellershoff has pointed out,¹⁶ the symptoms of her fatal illness - exhaustion, stomach cramps, vomiting, hair loss and jaundice - parallel the symptoms of pregnancy. This suggests a considerable hostility towards the progenitive function of women. The reaction of the *First Love* narrator to Lulu's pregnancy shows a similar attitude:

Look, she said, stooping over her breasts, the haloes are darkening already. I summoned up my remaining strength and said Abort, abort and they'll blush like new. (FL 58)

The woman uses a term which suggests sanctity (haloes) to describe her symptom, while the narrator would have her nipples blush - imputing to them shame or embarrassment. He subsequently deserts her, but the full horror of the situation, for him, is illustrated by the fact that her childbirth screams haunt him perpetually.

In *Mercier and Camier* childbirth is also rejected with horror by a male character. Mr Conaire has offered to buy a drink for Teresa, a barmaid whom he addresses as "rosebud". In fact a more appropriate metaphor would be a rose-hip: she has a husband and several children. Conaire reacts in an amusingly extreme way to this information:

When I think what it means, said Mr Conaire.
The torn flesh! The pretty crutch in tatters!
The screams! The blood! The glair! The after-
birth! He put his hand before his eyes. The
afterbirth! He groaned.

16. Dieter Wellershoff, "Failure of an Attempt at De-Mythologisation in Samuel Beckett's Novels" in Martin Esslin (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 100.

All the best, said Teresa. ...

Forgive me, he said, when I think of women I think of maidens, I can't help it. They have no hairs, they pee not neither do they cack. (MC 53-54)

There is comic irony in the implicit contrast between conventionally idealised views on motherhood and the actual event of childbirth, as Conaire describes it. However, he reserves his deepest grief not for the mother, but for the child: the afterbirth. ("Afterbirth" is a pun - the immediate connotation is the placenta, but the less obvious and clearly more significant meaning is the post-natal state of existence.) Conaire's misery is amusingly undercut by Teresa's jolly, casual but life-affirmative toast. The final few lines establish Conaire's total rejection of female physiology - not only does he find the sexual and procreative function of female genitals insupportable, he denies women the normal human processes of defecating and urinating. These last lines are also a profane parody of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus enjoins the multitude to turn from the material and secular world and rely on God's providence: "consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28). Conaire's allusion, scatological though it is, by connection with the original, suggests the flower-like purity of idealised, immaculate womanhood. The message of the original passage is pushed to an extreme - Conaire's maidens are so ethereal, so removed from secular concerns, that they do not need to eliminate waste in the normal human fashion. His view of female genital functions is exceptionally sterile.

A more subtle affinity for the sterile is suggested in *Texts for Nothing*, in which the narrator tells himself that "no one's going to love you and no one's going to kill you, perhaps you'll emerge in the high depression of Gobi, you'll feel at home there" (NK 82). "High depression" seems overly contradictory, unless it is interpreted as both an emotional state and a geographical feature.

The fact that the narrator would be most comfortable in the desert suggests his extreme rejection of any kind of fecundity. In *Malone Dies* Macmann is praised as one whose "semen had never done any harm to anyone" (MD 221) - that is, one who has not reproduced himself. The Unnamable would like to number himself among those "born of a wet dream and dead before morning" (U 349). In *Lessness*, a highly abstracted work (the very title of which is a denial of increase) the words "true refuge issueless" (L 7) appear. The suggestion is that safety, a "refuge", can only be found in a self-contained location and "issueless" may refer to both the insularity of the refuge and the state from which nothing - neither literature nor physical children - is given forth. This rejection of continuity, of creative extension beyond oneself, occasionally appears in less opaque fiction as an outburst against children. Mercier drives his children away from him, shouting "Fuck off out of here" (MC 31). Once again, the expletive is carefully chosen: sex and the perpetuation of life are inextricably linked and reviled. The narrator of "The Expelled" also directs invective against children, with the amusing energy of the coward: "I loathe children ... I personally would lynch them with the utmost pleasure, I don't say I'd lend a hand, no, I am not a violent man, but I'd encourage the others and stand them drinks when it was done" (NK 15). When hostility toward regeneration combines with hostility toward women, mothers are castigated as the source of life, and the attitude of existential rejection receives its most vitriolic expression.

Mothers in Beckett's fiction are usually oppressive or unresponsive. When the narrator of *How It Is* recalls the way in which his mother's eyes "burn with severe love" (HII 16) the emphasis falls on severity. In "The End" a child is inexplicably spurned by his mother: "A small boy, stretching out his hands and looking up at the blue sky, asked his mother how such a thing was possible. Fuck off, she said" (NK 46). A more embellished version of the same tale appears in the later work, *Company*. In *Company* it is the narrator himself, as a child, who is the victim of maternal

exasperation - whereas the incident in "The End" is overheard and recounted. The *Company* version is more painful, by virtue of being more detailed and understated (the surprising - and therefore comic - expletive does not appear) and because it has more personal significance for the narrator. The mother in *Company* offers little communication to her child, who wonders whether or not she is pregnant and, speaking to himself, remembers that her "violet lips do not return your smile" (C 56). The pregnancy speculation reveals explicitly Oedipal desires on the part of the child: "Can it be she is with child without your having asked for so much as her hand?" (C 59). This adds to the impression of maternal distance and mystery, and suggests the child's yearning for contact. The occasional sympathetic portrayal of mothers in Beckett's fiction is more poignant than positive: in "From an Abandoned Work" the narrator's mother waves at him "in sad helpless love" (NK 140). Typically, comprehension is absent from their relationship - the narrator does not know if his mother is calling him to her or urging him on his way.

The relationship between mother and son in Beckett's fiction is - at least as far as the sons are concerned - characterised by mutual guilt. (There are no developed mother/daughter relationships, just Mrs Lambert in *Malone Dies*, who is neutral - that is to say, not protective when it comes to her husband's incestuous desire for their daughter.) Most of Beckett's characters are afflicted with an ambiguous sense of sin, probably "the sin" as Beckett remarks in *Proust*, "of having been born" (P 49). It is not surprising that creatures as preoccupied with both suffering and understanding as Beckett's characters are, should interpret their pain as punishment. Since the characters look beyond the superficial, beyond passing incidents and glib explanations, it is also understandable that they should trace the cause of this punishment to birth: the origin of their suffering. Suffering, punishment, guilt and birth are explicitly connected in *Malone Dies*, when Malone traces the reasoning of his character Macmann, on the subjects of pain and guilt. Macmann has the muddled impression, instantly qualified, that his original crime was birth:

The idea of punishment came to his mind, addicted it is true to that chimera and probably impressed by the posture of the body and the fingers clenched as though in torment. And without knowing exactly what his sin was he felt full well that living was not a sufficient atonement for it or that this atonement was in itself a sin, calling for more atonement, and so on, as if there could be anything but life, for the living. And no doubt he would have wondered if it was really necessary to be guilty in order to be punished but for the memory, more and more galling, of his having consented to live in his mother, then to leave her. And this again he could not see as his true sin, but as yet another atonement which had miscarried and, far from cleansing him of his sin, plunged him in it deeper than before. And truth to tell the ideas of guilt and punishment were confused together in his mind, as those of cause and effect so often are in the minds of those who continue to think. (MD 220)

What is especially interesting about this passage is the notion of "consent" - of responsibility, on the part of the foetus, for his foetal state. Many of the narrators express - if obliquely - an Oedipal attraction. Molloy tells us that his mother confuses him with his father; the narrator of *Company*, as we have seen, has a vague matrimonial intention towards his mother; the Unnamable, punning on carnal knowledge and conception, asks: "Innate knowledge of my mother ... is that conceivable?" (U 273). It is as though sons were both their mother's inseminators and foetuses. This question of responsibility, of "consent" and therefore some freedom of choice in one's early existential state, is not clarified. But if the characters experience guilt over their own birthings, they project this sense of sin strongly on to their mothers: "My mother is it? said Mercier. She died perpetrating me, the slut. Rather than meet my eye" (MC 46). Mothers are evasive and culpable. Their blameworthiness arises partly from the fact that they are responsible for the cessation of that most delightful phase of existence: the foetal state, which is often regarded with deep nostalgia. Belacqua claims to want "very much to be back in the caul, on my back in the dark forever" (MPK 28). This echoes

Beckett's poem "Sanies I": "ah to be back in the caul now with no trusts / no fingers no spoilt love" (*CP* 17). Molloy calls the foetal state "the only endurable, just endurable period of my enormous history" (*Mo* 19) - acknowledging that this was "spoilt" somewhat by his mother's attempts to abort him. The contrast between pre- and post natal states is pointed out by the narrator of *How It Is*, who recalls that "from the murmurs of my mother" he was "shat into the incredible tohy-bohu" of life (*HII* 42). Here birth is described as the elimination of waste. Mothers bear the responsibility for initiating the misery which is life, therefore they are targets for invective in Beckett's fiction - invective such as Molloy uses, when he calls his mother "that poor old uniparous whore" (*Mo* 19). The Unnamable feels this animosity deeply: he imagines himself "looking for my mother to kill her, I should have thought of that a bit earlier, before being born" (*U* 360). This hostility towards women and regeneration should be viewed as more than just the denial of a significant female biological function. It represents a rejection of the continuity of life itself and female lovers and mothers are made to bear the burden of guilt for the existential suffering of the entire race. Since this rejection of life is inseparable from humorous and denigratory descriptions of the mother/son relationship and of sexual encounters, it is an inversion of a comic principle which connects sex in an amusing context with positive fruition.

In Beckett's fiction parody is a powerful weapon in the service of comic ridicule. When stereotypical female characters and simplified versions of the ideals which cluster about women in life and literature are parodically ridiculed, concord between the sexes is seen as delusive and existential affirmation - in the form of procreation - is trivialised. In Beckett's early fiction he uses parody to expose sentimentality and he also caricatures certain kinds of women. However in his recent work "Ill Seen Ill Said"¹⁷ the female character appears as an object, observed and

17. Samuel Beckett, "Ill Seen Ill Said", *The New Yorker* (Oct. 5, 1981), pp. 48-58.

described from many angles with an elegant detachment which emphasises the narrator's estrangement from his character, but without the use of reductive parody. Meanwhile the otherness of women is a constant theme of Beckett's fiction, although the techniques which he uses to suggest this distance change during the course of his work. The following discussion considers the reductive effect of parodic mockery of women in Beckett's fiction.

In "The Smeraldina's *Billet-Doux*", which forms a chapter of *More Pricks than Kicks*, affected sentimentality and the shallow clichés of romantic literature are parodied. The clichés include immoderate vows of fidelity, tearstained letters, moonlit walks, foreboding dreams, testing tasks and photographs of the beloved which must be kissed nightly. Smeraldina's urgent sexuality further undercuts these vapid romantic rituals.

Smeraldina begins her letter with an overblown (and mis-spelled) apostrophe to Belacqua: "BEL BEL MY own bloved, allways and for ever mine!!" (MPK 137). This sets the tone of the exaggerated rhetoric, undermined by clumsy expression, which follows. The paragraph concludes with a struggle between sentimentality and commonsense: "Whitch is the greater: the pain of being away from eachother, or the pain of being with eachother, crying at eachother beauty? I suppose the last is the greater, otherwise we would of given up all hope of ever being anything els but miserable" (MPK 137).

Comic highlights from the body of the letter include a description of a tea-dance at which the apparently love-sick Smeraldina found consolation. Clearly, the misery of Smeraldina's estrangement from Belacqua does not inhibit her social life, and this undermines her description of her "pain", however frequently she might write "Bloved Bloved Bloved Bel Bel Bel" in her "little Book" (MPK 138), or however deeply she may treasure the sock he left behind on his last visit. This undercurrent of insincerity is sustained as she informs Belacqua about an invitation which she

intends to accept, from a man who "dances quite well and is the right hight for me" (MPK 138). Although she quickly qualifies this with "A flirt is very amuseing but shouldn't go further than that" (MPK 138), her credibility is diminished.

A little later she anticipates Belacqua's arrival: "Soon I will be counting the hours untill I can go to the station and find you amongst the crowded platform but I don't think I will be able to wear my grey costume if it is too cold and then I will have to wear Mammy furcoat" (MPK 138). Since Smeraldina appears to accord equal emotional value to meeting Belacqua and choosing her costume for the outing, her anticipation is made to seem banal. The meeting at the railway station is the same reunion described, from a masculine perspective, in "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*".

Later in the letter, Smeraldina casts further doubts on her sincerity by revealing that "my love is so vast that when I am introduced to some young man and he starts doing the polite I get a quivver all ofer" (MPK 139). Complete fidelity to one man does not seem consistent with tremulousness, when meeting another. This is followed by more absurd assurances of love and despair, as Smeraldina claims that Belacqua's image is obscured by tears: "Ich seh Dich nicht mehr Tränen hindern mich!", and exclaims "My God! My true dog! My baby!" (MPK 140). Perhaps the most strikingly ironic self-betrayal in the letter occurs when Smeraldina compares the love which she shares with Belacqua with the emotion which a couple with whom they are acquainted have for one another: "the love between Ivy and Bill is not real, there allways seems to be some sort of affection about it" (MPK 140). She means affectation, but beyond the amusing malapropism a more ironic humour is at work, since Smeraldina's own self-contradictions and exclamations are so affected.

Smeraldina concludes her letter with more of the sentimentality which has characterised her correspondence so far - "your photograph is waiting to be kissed" (MPK 141) - and with intense anticipation of their lovemaking.

Deirdre Bair claims that "The Smeraldina's *Billet-Doux*" was originally sent to Beckett in all sincerity by his cousin, Peggy Sinclair, and incorporated *verbatim* in *More Pricks than Kicks*.¹⁸ The sentiments expressed in the letter are so pointedly exaggerated that this seems unlikely. It is more probable that Beckett crafted a letter which was based on Peggy Sinclair's correspondence. However, if Deirdre Bair is correct, "The Smeraldina's *Billet-Doux*" is an example of the way in which a text is defined by its context (rather as the reader's interpretation of Belacqua's sonnet in "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" is shaped by the prose which surrounds it). Whatever the origins of the letter, in *More Pricks than Kicks* it becomes a parody of sentimental posturing.

"The Smeraldina's *Billet-Doux*" is a significant example of the use of the epistolary form in Beckett's fiction. This form seems to lend itself to ironic characterisation (with or without authorial intention, as the critical debate over Richardsons's *Pamela* testifies). In Beckett's hands, the love-letter is a succession of ironies of self-betrayal. Through irony, the letter travesties itself (inflated emotion is consistently undercut with banality) and Smeraldina's sentimental attitude, her capriciousness and her naivety are skilfully parodied. Smeraldina's strength, as a character, lies not so much in the wealth of detail she offers about herself (from the nature of her outings, family and friends down to the blemish on her leg) as in her revealingly unconscious irony. Beckett could, however, have achieved a similar immediacy of characterisation with non-epistolary first person narration. The fact that Smeraldina's prose appears in a letter is important for a number of reasons. In a letter, Smeraldina is not addressing the general reader; she has a specific recipient in mind. When we (the general readers) read this letter, we are cast in the role of voyeurs, of illicit witnesses to one side of a private discourse. This is emphasised when Smeraldina

18. Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p. 146.

remarks that "*Arschlochweh* is married and gone to the Schweiz with his wife" (MPK 141) which reinforces the privacy of the letter, since the general reader has no way of knowing what significance *Arschlochweh*, his wife or his honeymoon in Switzerland holds for Belacqua and Smeraldina - or, indeed, how he deserves the derogatory nickname of "pain in the arse". In this way, Beckett draws the reader into the milieu of passive observation which is Belacqua's sexual preference. So the reader shares a complicity with the central character which goes beyond actually reading over his shoulder. The epistolary form of "The Smeraldina's *Billet-Doux*" also has significance in terms of the general discussion of women in Beckett's fiction. Beckett rarely uses female first person narrators. Smeraldina's letter is the first example in Beckett's fiction of a woman speaking in her own voice. However, Smeraldina's prose is a private communication, which has no pretensions to artistic merit. So a common division between male artists, and females, who (although they may be biologically creative, and literate) seldom create literature, is introduced into Beckett's work.

To the retrospective reader, "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" and "The Smeraldina's *Billet-Doux*" are companion pieces, in that they present, respectively, a masculine and a feminine approach to the same incident: the meeting between Belacqua and Smeraldina at the railway station. "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" has a masculine narrator who focusses on Belacqua, a masculine character. The story is a piece of literature in the artistic sense and it is also addressed to a general readership. The incident itself is described through a veil of literary and artistic traditions. This, it seems, is the masculine perspective. "The Smeraldina's *Billet-Doux*", on the other hand, is a letter - a discourse which is circumscribed in terms of readership. More importantly, Smeraldina's letter is culturally narrow. She does not allude to sculptors, popes or political figures. Her cultural background is confined to romantic films and novels with titles like "*Die Grosse Løbe*". She *attempts* a Beethoven sonata and she quotes

Goethe, extremely clumsily, to reinforce a point about her loneliness and constancy. Sexual desire, tricked out in the trappings of romance, is behind her anticipation of the meeting with Belacqua. So the feminine perspective is - culturally - sentimental, inept or naive, and Smeraldina herself appears to be all of these things - as well as sexually rapacious. Behind the parodic humour of "*Sedendo et Quiesciendo*" and "The Smeraldina's *Billet-Doux*" a polarisation between masculine and feminine is established, and the feminine half of this polarisation is seen to be trivial-minded and sexually obsessive.

In "A Wet Night" - an episode which occurs earlier in *More Pricks than Kicks* than "The Smeraldina's *Billet-Doux*" - Beckett caricatures the woman who is both erudite and sexually predatory. When we first meet the Frica, she is "singing Havelock Ellis in a deep voice, frankly itching to do that which is not seemly" (MPK 49). She orchestrates a literary and musical salon to which Belacqua and his beloved, the Alba, are invited. The description of this evening allows Beckett considerable scope for amusing caricatures of the Frica's guests, including a sycophantic Countess and - as we saw in an earlier chapter of this thesis - the Frica's pet poet, who declaims verse with false spontaneity. However Beckett's most scathing caricature is that of the Frica herself:

The Frica combed her hair, back and back she raked her purple tresses till to close her eyes became a problem. The effect was throttled gazelle. ...

Throttled gazelle gives no idea. Her features, as though the hand of an unattractive ravisher were knotted in her chevelure, were set at half-cock and locked in a rictus. She had frowned to pencil her eyebrows, so now she had four. The dazzled iris was domed in a white agony of entreaty, the upper lip writhed back in a snarl to the unteneted nostrils. Would she bite her tongue off, that was the interesting question. The nutcracker chin betrayed a patent clot of thyroid gristle. It was impossible to set aside the awful suspicion that her flattened mammae, in sympathy with this tormented eructation of countenance, had put forth cutwaters and was rowelling her corsage.

But the face was beyond appeal, a flagrant seat of injury. She had merely to arrange her hands so that the palm and fingers of the one touched the palm and fingers of the other and hold them thus joined before the breast with a slight upward inclination to look like a briefless martyress in rut. (MPK 57-58)

The Frica is sexually frustrated and therefore perpetually aggrieved. Even her attempt to surreptitiously watch Belacqua undress is thwarted. When he arrives, late, drunk and sodden with rain, she tries to persuade him to take off his clothes and dry himself - not out of concern for his comfort, but because she plans to "put the lens in the keyhole" (MPK 68). Belacqua resists, the Frica is livid. This harsh study of a would-be sexually active bluestocking is significant in that the Frica is something of a rarity in Beckett fiction: a woman who creates an intellectual milieu. However, the banality of this milieu is ridiculed.

Belacqua's sweetheart, the Alba, acts as a foil to the unpleasant Frica. Her "broad pale bored face" and "scarlet gown" (MPK 50) are beautiful. Although she is vain about her appearance, this vanity has limits - she does not join in the intellectual posturing which takes place at the Frica's party. When Belacqua (faced with the insupportable prospect of a recitation by the Poet) finds it necessary to leave, the Alba departs with him, giving him the comfort of warmth, alcohol and a kind of sanctuary in her home. The Alba is a positive woman, not only because of her beauty, good sense and generosity, but because she is not sexually threatening. A delightful parody of advertising jargon, and the effect which the pseudo-advertisement has on Belacqua, illustrates this point. Prior to joining the Alba at the Frica's party. Belacqua buys a newspaper, which he reads as he drinks porter in a public bar. He lights on the following advertisement:

"A woman" he read with a thrill "is either: a short-below-the-waist, a big-hip, a sway-back, a big-abdomen or an average. If the bust be too cogently controlled, then shall fat roll from scapula to scapula. If it be made passable and slight, then shall the diaphragm bulge and be unsightly. Why not therefore invest chez a reputable corset-builder in the brassière-cum-corset décolleté, made from the finest Broches, Contils and Elastics, centuple stitched in wearing parts, fitted with immovable spiral steels? It bestows stupendous diaphragm and hip support, it enhances the sleeveless backless neckless evening gown ...", (MPK 51)

In this, all women are reduced to a catalogue of physical deficiencies and the remedy offered in garbled English and clichéd French is one of constraint and artifice. The Alba, however, is removed from all such stereotypes. Belacqua, first struck by the potential for sleevelessness, backlessness and necklessness in the Alba's costume for the night ahead, decides that she does not possess any of the attributes listed in the advertisement:

Was she a short-below or a sway-back? She had no waist, nor did she deign to sway. She was not to be classified. Not to be corseted. Not woman of flesh (MPK 51).

So the Alba is not carnal, she is distanced from the physical urges which make the Frica such a successful target for lampooning. This does not necessarily make her asexual, but it does mean that she is not a sexual predator. Belacqua's revulsion from female flesh and the motivations which underlie this revulsion are revealed when he panics at the possibility that the Alba's dress may be backless. He contemplates the shoulder-blades which would then be revealed:

He saw it as a flower-de-luce, a spatulate leaf with segments angled back, like the wings of a butterfly sucking a blossom, from their common hinge. Then fetching from further afield, as an obelisk, a cross-potent, pain and death, still death, a bird crucified on a wall (MPK 51).

Belacqua's chain of images progresses from the delicacy of the flower-de-luce to the torture of crucifixion. For him, flesh and bone ultimately signifies tormented fixity (the crucified bird) and death.

The parody of corsetry advertising (and its aftermath) and the parodic caricature of the Frica make significant points about the nature of women and their relationship to sexuality and art in Beckett's fiction. The advertisement presents women as creatures who are composed of unattractive physical segments: the diaphragm, the bust and so forth. Moreover, women as a group are defined by the limitations of their physiques (whether they be big-hipped or sway-backed) and, in the view of the advertiser, *all* women fall into one of these categories of limitation. Belacqua, by considering the Alba to be exceptional, points up the inadequacies of such a system. So the advertising parody is more than an amusingly exaggerated spoof of jargon, it also mocks an attitude which would define women in purely physical terms, and derogatory terms at that. Women, or rather, certain women like the Alba, are more than wayward flesh. The Frica and the Alba balance and counterpoint each other. In the process, the characteristics of each are thrown into sharp relief. The Frica is sexually and culturally acquisitive, and her kind of sexuality (the intellectualisation of sex through quotations from Havelock Ellis, and the attempt to spy on Belacqua's nakedness) is as forced and self-indulgent as the verse which the Poet inflicts on her guests. She is sexually and culturally grasping and the result is mediocrity, on both a personal and a cultural level. The Alba, on the other hand, eschews cultural pretensions and sexual hunger. She is an example of feminine discrimination (on an intellectual level) and generosity (in sexual terms). However, these attributes do not outweigh Belacqua's revulsion from her female flesh, a revulsion which is motivated by fear of the pain, constraint and annihilation which, to him, the physical seems to represent.

The portrayal of women in *Murphy* has much in common with the characterisation of the women we have discussed in *More Pricks than Kicks*. Celia is sensible, benevolent and comely, like the Alba. Just as Beckett gives the Alba an opposite (in the Frica) he contrasts Celia with the unappealing Miss Counihan. The Frica and Miss Counihan are both caricatures of personality types, but beyond this they have little in common. The Frica's sexuality is at once greedy and furtive. Her sexuality also intersects with her intellectual pretentiousness. Miss Counihan's sexuality is no less ostentatious, but it has the same visceral quality as Smeraldina's yearnings and, like Smeraldina, Miss Counihan's desires are overlaid with sentimentality and hypocritical self-contradictions. (However, unlike Smeraldina, Miss Counihan is mercenary.) In terms of sexuality the Frica resembles *Murphy*'s Miss Carridge, who does actually succeed in witnessing, through a keyhole, Cooper's preparations for bed. Her expectations are dashed: Cooper sleeps in his "socks, moleskins, shirt and hat" (M 144).

In Miss Counihan, we have a further example of Beckett's use of caricature to demolish an attitude of sentimentality which is (in his work) peculiar to women. However in *Murphy* the exaggerated ridiculousness of caricature is not the sole method of passing judgement - Beckett also condemns Miss Counihan (and women like her) out of the mouth of Wylie, one of her fellow-conspirators and alternate suitors. Early in *Murphy* Neary observes that "Love requited ... is a short-circuit" (M 7). Short circuits bother Neary: he sleeps with his feet crossed, hoping that in this way he preserves the flow of his vital energies. However no opportunity to test the short circuit axiom arises in *Murphy*; mutual passion is rare. The desires of Celia and Murphy are seldom complementary. Miss Counihan, Neary and Wylie are connected as much by lust as by their common purpose of finding Murphy. But

Miss Counihan does not reciprocate Neary's passion, which fades. Although she responds more warmly to Wylie, Wylie regards her private income as highly as her person and towards the end of the novel he is equivocal about both.

In the crucible of fluctuating desire which is the *Murphy* world, Miss Counihan, "mistress of the graded swoon" (M 146) sees herself as the romantic heroine. With her "high buttocks and her low breasts" (M 123) she is, physically at least, the inverse of this stereotype, but what her body lacks she remedies through comportment and conversation. Lowering herself on to Neary's grubby bed in a London rooming-house, she contrives to appear as though she is sitting on "a bank of bluebells somewhere in the country" (M 116). She is also mistress of the idiom of popular romantic fiction. The narrator reports her rejection of Neary's suit in a parody of such idiom:

She was set aside for Murphy, who had torn himself away to set up for his princess, in some less desolate quarter of the globe, a habitation meet for her. When he had done this he would come flying back to claim her. She had not heard from him since his departure and therefore did not know where he was, or what exactly he was doing. This did not disquiet her, as he had explained that to make good and love, were it only by letter, at one and the same time, was more than he could manage. (M 32-33).

This projection of romantic devotion and economic success is highly ironical, since before this confrontation between Neary and Miss Counihan we have witnessed Murphy and Celia's domestic situation in London. Miss Counihan has been conspicuously absent from Murphy's considerations. Moreover, her own fidelity is called into question when she manoeuvres herself into a further meeting with Neary:

Miss Counihan went on to say that she could not very well renounce a young man, such a nice young man, who for all she knew to the contrary was steadily amassing

a large fortune so that she might not be without any of the little luxuries to which she was accustomed, and whom of course she loved very dearly, unless she had superlative reasons for doing so, such for example as would flow from a legally attested certificate of his demise, a repudiation of her person under his own hand and seal, or overwhelming evidence of infidelity and economic failure. She welcomed the happy chance that allowed her to communicate this - er - modified view of the situation to Mr Neary, looking so much more - er - youthful without his whiskers on the very eve of her departure to Dublin, where Wynn's Hotel would always find her. (M 34)

The invitation to Neary which is implicit in this final sentence and the emphasis on Murphy's economic situation suggest Miss Counihan's strongly pragmatic bent. Her genuine feelings for Murphy are revealed after she learns of his death, which is, for her, a most satisfactory outcome. She has not been directly rejected by Murphy, and he has not (to her way of thinking, at least) exactly deserted her for Celia, or some other woman. So the position to which Miss Counihan aspires, of besotted princess awaiting the dazzling return of her equally besotted swain, is travestied by the reality of the expedient, self-interested attitudes she betrays at every point and the entire situation as it is revealed in the general narrative.

However, these ironic twists are only one part of the effect: Miss Counihan, as a caricature of a popular romantic stereotype, is extremely funny and her speeches make highly amusing reading. She has some of the predictableness, the "rigidity of ... mind and character"¹⁹ which Bergson classifies as a prerequisite of the typical comic character. Bergson has also pointed out that "repetition (and) inversion" are among the principal "methods of light comedy".²⁰ In Miss Counihan's final declamation Beckett uses both of these techniques within a parody of the damsel-in-distress cliché and a parodically travelogue view of Ireland. Miss Counihan

19. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, p. 21.

20. Henri Bergson, *ibid.*, p. 89.

is gripping Wylie's lapels outside the morgue where Murphy's remains await cremation:

Do not leave me, oh do not walk out on me at this unspeakable juncture ... Oh hand in hand let us return to the dear land of our birth, the bays, the bogs, the moors, the glens, the lakes, the rivers, the streams, the brooks, the mists, the - er - fens, the - er - glens, by tonight's mail-train. (*M* 152)

This rosy list of Irish geographical features repeats itself then ceases with the exhaustion of Miss Counihan's imagination. The banality of the mail-train amusingly undercuts her vision of clasped hands and misty glens.

Miss Counihan's predictability provides grounds for Wylie's denunciation of love-sick women in general:

A man could no more work a woman out of a position on her own ground of sentimental lech than he could outsmell a dog. Her instinct was a menstruum, resolving every move he made, immediately and without effort, into its final implications for her vanity and interest. (*M* 73)

Wylie translates one woman's capacity for sentimentality and expediency into a vision of female single-mindedness, akin to a bestially acute sense which works as inevitably as her menstrual cycle. Women are inexorably narcissistic and egocentric. In Miss Counihan's case, the judgement is appropriate. Pondering the relationships between his secondary characters and their motives for seeking Murphy, the narrator makes similar points about female self-interest and tenacity:

Women are really extraordinary, the way they want to give their cake to the cat and have it. They never quite kill the thing they think they love, lest their instinct for artificial respiration should go a-begging. (*M* 114)

The narrator's parodic allusion is to Oscar Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" (in which Wilde suggests that all men kill the thing they love). Beckett's narrator, contemplating the fixity of purpose in feminine love, twists the allusion so that its original meaning (about the transience of love-objects) is denied. Earlier in the novel the narrator condemns Miss Counihan through her parodically sentimental speech, as she begs Cooper for information about Murphy:

"If you have news of my love, speak, speak, I
adjure you." She was an omnivorous reader. (M 69)

The narrator's aside comments amusingly on the verbal excesses of those who apply the kind of language which is the norm in fiction (in this case, popular romantic fiction) to conversations in life. The narrator's explanatory adjective - "omnivorous" - is, however, extremely derogatory, for it reveals Miss Counihan as a member of that category of consuming women which was discussed earlier in this chapter. It is not (as is the case with some of these women) the male psyche which Miss Counihan ingests and reduces to excreta, it is the printed word. Words, in Beckett's terms, are almost exclusively the product of male creative energy. The essential impropriety of a female writer is suggested when Wylie imagines a situation in which Neary has freed himself from the compulsion to seek Murphy:

This Neary that does not love Miss Counihan, nor
need his Needle (Wylie), any more, may soon get
over Murphy and find himself free, following his
drift, to itch for an ape, or a woman writer. (M 121)

Women writers are bizarre love-objects in the *Murphy* world and women readers, like Miss Counihan, make themselves equally ridiculous.

Through the parodic characterisation of Miss Counihan, then, Beckett amusingly reveals the pragmatism inherent in the clichés of romantic fiction and in sentimental attitudes themselves. His parody suggests that sentimental love is self-delusive, possessive, and ultimately ridiculous. He stringently criticises the kind of woman who expounds

such love. The narrator identifies Miss Counihan as consuming and destructive to the written word which is the creative province of men. This upholds a distinction between masculine and feminine creativity which is noticeable in Beckett's fiction.

Several parodies in *Watt* ridicule sexuality or the outcome of sexual activity. The first which we will consider imitates both the form and content of advertising jargon. "Bando",²¹ the product which Arthur recommends to Mr Graves (who cannot "get on" with his wife) is an aphrodisiac which has transformed Arthur's life:

Have you tried Bando, Mr Graves, said Arthur.
A capsule, before and after meals, in a little
warm milk, and again at night, before turning in.
I had tried everything, and was thoroughly disgusted,
when a friend spoke to me of Bando. Her husband was
never without it, you understand. Try it, she said,
and come back in five or six years. I tried it, Mr
Graves, and it changed my whole outlook on life. From
being a moody, listless, constipated man, covered with
squames, shunned by my fellows, my breath fetid and
my appetite depraved (for years I had eaten nothing
but high fat rashers), I became, after four years of
Bando, vivacious, restless, a popular nudist, regular
in my daily health, almost a father and a lover of
boiled potatoes. Bando. Spelt as pronounced. (*W* 168)

This parodies the testimonials which appear in advertisements for quasi-medicinal products. Much of the comic effect is due to the displacement of our expectations. After Arthur's friend suggests that he return "in five or six years" - we anticipate "days", or even "weeks", only to read "years". The term "depraved appetite", which is normally used to condemn unusual sexual preferences, literally describes the exclusive consumption of a certain food: "high-fat rashers". When Arthur tells Mr Graves that he became "a lover" after the use of "Bando", we do not expect the object of his love to be "boiled potatoes". Moreover, the name of Arthur's product seems to identify it as a very banal kind of aphrodisiac: "Bando" suggests the constriction of prophylactic contraceptives.

21. Raymond Federman, in *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*, p. 104, suggests that "Bando" is "an allusion to the suggestive French slang word *bander* (to have an erection)".

Revulsion from sexuality and procreation emerges in *Watt*, through the description of the Lynches, the unwholesome extended family whose computations on the basis of the age of their members are defeated by death. The source of unwholesomeness, in the Lynch women at least, is usually their female biological functions. Anne, the mother of twins who, though born healthy, "did not remain fine very long nor did they continue to bounce" (W 103), is also the victim of "a painful congenital disorder of an unmentionable kind" (W 99). The coyness of "unmentionable" and the pun on congenital/genital suggests that her illness may be venereal in origin. This is supported by the statement that Anne is "rotten with disease" (W 105) and the suggestion that "parts of Anne" were inclined to "greenness" (W 106). Perhaps her twins do not flourish because they have been exposed to infection in the birth canal. Mag's epileptic fits are triggered by her menstrual cycle. Bridie, "aged fifteen years (is) a prop and stay to the family, sleeping as she did by day and at night receiving in the toolshed so as not to disturb the family for twopence, or threepence, or fourpence, or sometimes even fivepence at a time, that depended, or a bottle of ale" (W 100). Liz, debilitated by the birth of her twentieth child, dies. These afflictions (if Bridie's prostitution can be termed an affliction) add up to an extremely negative view of the female reproductive functions - a view which is often put forward in Beckett's fiction. Usually, however, women's physical functions - whether in sexual contact or in childbirth - are responsible for the suffering of male characters. In the Lynch family, women not only perpetuate a degenerate and miserable tribe, they themselves suffer from afflictions which originate in their function as perpetuators. At the same time, the ideal of a large supportive rural Irish family is travestied.

Watt's encounters with the fisherwoman, Mrs Gorman, ridicule sexuality and seem to recommend sterility. They also foreshadow the sexual liaisons of the trilogy characters.²² These encounters

22. Vivian Mercier makes this point in *Beckett/Beckett*, New York, Oxford (1977), p. 213.

are remarkable for their grotesquerie. Mrs Gorman is "of an advanced age" (W 137) - a condition which seems to appeal to Watt, who earlier in the novel recalls "an old lady of delicate upbringing ... amputated well above the knee" (W 70), who succumbed three times, to his charms. Although Mrs Gorman is "denied those properties that attract men to women" (W 137), her limbs are intact. Watt and Mrs Gorman come together in a travesty of domestic bliss:

... he would have her in the kitchen, and open for her a bottle of stout, and set her on his knee, and wrap his right arm about her waist, and lean his head upon her right breast (the left having unhappily been removed in the heat of a surgical operation), and in this position remain, without stirring, or stirring the least possible, forgetful of his troubles, for as long as ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour. And Mrs Gorman too, as with her left hand she stirred the grey-pink tufts and with her right at studied intervals raised the bottle to her lips, was in her own small way at peace too, for a time. (W 138-139)

Watt gives Mrs Gorman "velleitary, anxious" kisses, Mrs Gorman returns them as "unctuous and urbane" (W 139). Mrs Gorman is a debased Amazon (her breast has been accidentally amputated, rather than removed to facilitate the drawing of a bow in the hunt). As a fisherwoman, she represents the fertility of primal water (Erich Neumann tells us that the fish is an archetypal symbol of the fertility goddess).²³ However the promise (or, in Beckett's terms, threat) of regeneration which Mrs Gorman's association with fish suggests is not fulfilled. Watt and Mrs Gorman do not consummate their friendship. The narrator, in a parody of romantic clichés, puts forward one explanation for this:

Was it the echo murmuring in their hearts, in Watt's heart, in Mrs Gorman's, of past passion, ancient error, warning them not to sully not to trail, in the cloaca of clonic gratification, a flower so fair, so rare, so sweet, so frail? (W 140)

23. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, pp. 141, 276.

This possibility of an ennobling transcendence of the carnal (in Héloïse and Abelard fashion) is, however, immediately travestied by the narrator, as he points out that "Watt had not the strength, and Mrs Gorman had not the time" (*W* 140) for more passionate embraces. Their satisfaction is uncommon among couples in Beckett's fiction, but the ideal which it suggests is an anti-ideal: acceptance of sexual incompatibility.

In *Molloy*, the narrator describes his single encounter with "true love" in a travesty which brutally denigrates love, equating it totally with sex and denying the possibility of sexual satisfaction. This denial is achieved through comic irony, as putative ideals (love and positive sexual encounters) are fractured by the very terms used, simultaneously, to describe them. Molloy's speculation on the origin of love, in which the literalness of the physical is played off against metaphoric and ironic eloquence, exemplifies this:

... when your frantic member casts about for a rubbing-place, and the unction of a little mucous membrane, and meeting with none does not beat in retreat, but retains its tumefaction, it is then no doubt that true love comes to pass, and wings away, high above the tight fit and the loose. (*Mo* 54)

The love which "comes to pass" and "wings away" like a folkloric angel originates in the phallic urge and transcends the variations and limitations of female flesh. However, the melodramatic grotesquerie of "frantic member", the clinical accuracy of "mucous membrane", and the evaluation implicit in "the tight fit and the loose" seem too derogatory for the ideal of love to transcend. The carnal source of the love-angel receives comic emphasis to the detriment of the ideal of love itself.

The object of Molloy's brief and diffident passion is Ruth - or Edith. The liaison is trivialised by Molloy's inability to remember the woman's name accurately - an inability which points up a considerable lack of communication with his female partner.

Molloy is also deliberately ambiguous about Ruth's (or Edith's) gender (the only part of her body which he has seen is the nape of her neck) wondering whether or not she is a man - which would perhaps invalidate his experience of "true love". At the same time as the "true love" ideal is denigrated by association with a type of sexuality which is, for Molloy, more "tiring" (*Mo* 53) than ecstatic, Molloy's alienation from his partner is once again emphasised.

As in Smeraldina's letter and the Miss Counihan caricature, romantic cliché is parodied in order to ridicule romantic pretension. For example, Molloy speculates on Ruth's (or Edith's) death in a bathtub in conventionally sentimental terms: "When I think that she might have expired in my arms!". This is immediately undermined by his description of "the dirty water (which) spilt all over the floor and down on top of the lodger below" (*Mo* 54). Inversions of commonplace sexual situations also add to the humour: Ruth pays Molloy for his efforts, because "she was an idealist" (*Mo* 54) - although her kind of ideals are not elaborated. In a similar parodic reversal of the convention of sexually explicit literature, Molloy and Ruth are ancient and decrepit, and the position which they adopt for actual intercourse must cater to Ruth's rheumatism and lumbago. At the same time, the positive elements of the relationship - when Ruth cuts Molloy's toenails and he rubs "winter cream" into her "rump" (*Mo* 54) - are so mundane that they travesty the "true love" ideal which Molloy has ironically set up.

So the iconoclastic humour in the Ruth incident arises from the irreverence of the narration, the inversion of our preconceptions and the incongruity between ideal and actuality. However, it is Molloy's cruelly explicit - and funny - descriptions of sex which debunk the "true love" ideal most effectively:

She had a hole between her legs, oh not the bunghole I had always imagined, but a slit, and in this I put, or rather she put, my so-called virile member, not without difficulty, and I toiled and moiled until I discharged or gave up trying or was begged by her to stop. (*Mo* 53)

Thomas Mann has defined the grotesque as "that which is excessively true and excessively real"²⁴ and Molloy's description combines this type of immediacy with derogatory colloquialism ("bunghole") and a word for ejaculation ("discharge") which has connotations of dismissal (in a social context) or suppuration (in a pathological sense). The ideal of love clashes amusingly with such dense - and repugnant - physical details.

In *Malone Dies*, travesty, parodic sentiment and grim humour combine in Malone's description of the relationship between Macmann, an asylum inmate, and Moll, his keeper. As well as ridiculing (through exaggeration and inversion) the conventions and clichés associated with love and sex, the narrative parodies romantic literature: the love letter and the lyric.

The first description of Moll exemplifies the inversion of romantic clichés which we have seen at work in Molloy's tale. As is common in romantic literature, the lips of the female protagonist are described. In Moll's case, however, this feature is horrifically exaggerated: "the lips (were) so broad and thick that they seemed to devour half the face" (MD 236). Moll's enormous mouth also identifies her with Beckett's dangerously consuming female characters. The immensity of the threat which she represents to Macmann is expressed through the image of her single rotten tooth, carved to represent the Christian sacrifice and in constant danger of coming loose and being swallowed while she sleeps. Long before Macmann enters the asylum he has been described as lying in a cruciform position. No wonder he "not only closed his eyes, but covered them with his hands for greater safety" (MD 241) when first confronted with Moll's mouth. Moll's mouth confers upon her an elemental and very female power. During her emotional and physical decline, her tooth falls out - while she is conscious - and she puts it aside, so the symbol of her threat to Macmann is

24. Thomas Mann, quoted by Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Gloucester, Mass., Peter Smith (1968), p. 158.

removed. Yet Moll is responsible for a painful process of sensitisation in Macmann, as he, initially repelled by Moll, becomes more attached to her and witnesses the decline of her ardour. This reduces Macmann to a state of vulnerability in which "he mourned the long immunity he had lost, from shelter, charity and human tenderness" (MD 244). Through the grotesque humour in this tale of the couplings and affections of two mis-shapen elderly solitary people, love is condemned. The communication and sharing which it provides is transitory and painful.

Moll and Macmann, like Ruth and Molloy, are ancient and sexually incompetent, "dry and feeble" (MD 238). Their coupling is described with brutal frankness. However, there is an important distinction between the parodic targets of each piece: the true love ideal is demolished in *Molloy*, whereas in *Malone Dies* both love and the kind of literary expression which is stimulated by love are attacked. This is consistent with the different aims of each narrator: Molloy presents his story as reminiscence, whereas the Moll and Macmann tale is manifestly invented by Malone to divert himself from his increasing weakness. Since Malone's artistic motives and consciousness of his fantasies *as such* is sharper than Molloy's it is understandable that he should expand his parodic criticism of sex and love to include sustained parodies of (romantic) literature.

Moll writes letters to Macmann in celebration of their union, and Macmann writes poems to Moll. Moll's style features hackneyed metaphors: their love is a "superb sundown, after the long day of storm" (MD 239). One of these metaphors parodies the words of Joyce's Leopold Bloom who, on the subject of courting, observes that "cocks and lions do the same and stags".²⁵ When the grotesque Moll writes that "stags and hinds have their needs and we have ours" (MD 239) Beckett is briefly parodying Joyce, but he is also ridiculing the sentiment which justifies the expression of human sexuality (in this case, loathsome sexuality) by comparing it to

25. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 367.

the practices of "noble" beasts. Moll's letter, which includes coy pet names for herself and Macmann and coy euphemisms for various sexual techniques, travesties itself in banality. The letter also lapses into bathos - Moll prays that she and Macmann will die at precisely the same time, so that neither will leave the other bereft, then points out briskly (and ominously) that "In any case I have the key of the medicine cupboard" (MD 239). Comic inversion also contributes to the undermining of sentiment: Moll describes the aftermath of cosy embraces, in which she and Macmann "sink together, in an unhappiness that has no name" (MD 240). (The "unhappiness" is unexpected.) In general, Moll's sentiments are an incongruous mixture of the romantic and the morbid, as she anticipates death and celebrates love. Macmann's poems are no less macabre. Malone gives two examples, the second of which reads:

To the lifelong promised land
Of the nearest cemetery
With his Sucky hand in hand
Love it is at last leads Hairy. (MD 241)

Dieter Wellershoff has identified the specific genre which Macmann's poems imitate. He describes them as "shanties or parodies of Irish barroom ballads".²⁶ Macmann's poetry - combining clichés such as clasped hands and personified love with the comically carnal explicitness of the nicknames which Moll has devised for Macmann and herself - effectively ridicules itself.

In the Moll and Macmann story, then, female expression takes the form of a letter: ironically eloquent in places and full of banal, if inventive imagery, but with no artistic pretensions. Macmann's verses take a conventionally artistic form, but his poems are so banal that love must be seen as an inadequate source of artistic inspiration. The relationship between Moll and Macmann is only

26. Dieter Wellershoff, "Failure of an Attempt at De-Mythologisation in Samuel Beckett's Novels" in Martin Esslin (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 99.

briefly satisfactory. In a way which is characteristic of Beckett's treatment of the subject, Macmann is at first reluctant, then, as he becomes enthusiastic, Moll's passion abates. Reciprocated love is as rare as female artists in Beckett's fiction. Moreover, Moll is physically repulsive and it is her labial mouth which is her most appalling feature. Since Moll is the explicit creation of a male artist, Malone, this indicates a revulsion from essential femininity on the part of the masculine narrator. Yet there is some ambiguity in this. The creation of Moll can equally be seen as the operation of wish-fulfilment, as Malone projects aspects of his identity and situation on to his fictional creation, Macmann, then provides Macmann with a lover. However much Moll may appear to be a travesty of femininity, and however vehemently Malone may attempt to trivialise and dispense with her, Malone is also ambiguously attached to the part his female character plays in his story. This becomes apparent when he shows signs of being disturbed by his fictional material. After ironically mentioning the "true sexuality" (*MD* 241) which Macmann has achieved with Moll, Malone fractures his own discourse with "I am lost. Not a word" - suggesting that the subject distresses him. He attempts "a few words in conclusion on the decline of this liaison" (between Moll and Macmann) and once again breaks off with "No, I can't" (*MD* 242). However, this equivocal attachment is more than outweighed by the parodic content of the Moll and Macmann story, in which commonplace preconceptions about love and sex are imitated, distorted and travestied; and conventional expressions celebrating love - the love-letter and love-poetry - are derisively parodied. The effect of such parody is to present affection, sexuality and communication between the sexes as delusive - that is, to uphold the condition of sterility and estrangement which is presented as the human condition in Beckett's fiction.

The Unnamable also mocks faith in the possibility of positive relations between the sexes. He fantasises about Mahood and Marguerite (or Madeleine), the ~~restaurenteur~~ who keeps the limbless Mahood in a jar against which she has propped the menu of her

establishment. Marguerite, like Moll, is ambiguously beneficent: toward the end of the story she cares for Mahood tenderly, but it is she who has arranged the stone collar which makes it impossible for Mahood to conceal his head inside the jar. However, this story is a fantasy about the potential and limitations of the imagination, rather than a parodic tale at the expense of the conventions of romantic love. The Unnamable uses the story to escape from his situation by identifying with Mahood, his fictional creation, and through Marguerite's affirmation of his/Mahood's existence, he seeks confirmation of his identity. This is very circular: the Unnamable attempts to create a character who will then verify not only his existence, but his existence as Mahood, a character with a comfortable niche and a social function. However, this sophisticated closed system becomes vague, even as it is articulated. We are left with the grotesque and bizarre events of the story, and a suggestion of the possibilities which such stories might provide for the palliation of the situation of their creator.

Toward the end of *The Unnamable* the narrator tells himself a didactic tale which parodies conventional, linear narrative form and ironically suggests the futility of emotional attachment:

They love each other, marry, in order to love each other better, more conveniently, he goes to the wars, he dies at the wars, she weeps, with emotion, at having loved him, at having lost him, yep, marries again, in order to love again, more conveniently again, they love each other, you love as many times as necessary, as necessary in order to be happy, he comes back, the other comes back, from the wars, he didn't die at the wars after all, she goes to the station, to meet him, he dies in the train, of emotion, at the thought of seeing her again, having her again, she weeps, weeps again, with emotion again, at having lost him again, yep, goes back to the house, he's dead, the other is dead, the mother-in-law takes him down, he hanged himself, with emotion, at the thought of losing her, she weeps, weeps louder, at having loved him, at having lost him, there's a story for you, that was to teach me the nature of emotion, that's called emotion, what emotion can do, given favourable conditions, what love can do ... (U 374)

Through the narrator's comically inappropriate staccato delivery, punctuated by the flippant "yep", it can be seen that love - which is the "emotion" he describes - leads to sequential disaster and annihilation for males. The female character is central to this disaster.

After the trilogy there is a progression, in some of Beckett's fiction, towards an austerity which precludes parody and amusement. When the narrator of *How It Is* observes, in a commentary on his own tale, the "deterioration of the sense of humour" (HII 18) his remark is also applicable to many of the works which follow his own. This progression away from iconoclastic derision, away from spoofs and sardonic imitations, is really a progression away from engagement with conventions and stereotypes. As far as the subject of this chapter is concerned, it leads toward the detached observation of the avowedly unknowable female which we find in the recent story "Ill Seen Ill Said". Meanwhile the narrator's fascination with femaleness, with genetic otherness, does not abate as he ceases to exploit its comic possibilities. *All Strange Away*, which was written over a decade after the trilogy, explores the posture of a woman, Emma, in a way which emphasises the narrator's enduring interest in femaleness. In the very recent "One Evening"²⁷ an old woman who is recognisably the character of "Ill Seen Ill Said" is described in painstaking detail. "Ill Seen Ill Said" itself deserves detailed consideration to illustrate its quality of detached yet fascinated observation.

"Ill Seen Ill Said" is a highly abstracted work which concerns a nameless woman,²⁸ alone except for an unattached eye (which is perhaps the observation point of the omniscient narrator, itself observed) and twelve shadowy male figures who appear in the distance

27. Samuel Beckett, "One Evening", *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No. 6 (Autumn 1980), p. 7.

28. The circumstances of the woman resemble those of Beckett's own mother in her declining years. For a brief description of Beckett's "lonely mother in the tiny cold house with the roiling Irish sea on one side and desolate Redfern Cemetery on the other", see Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p. 297.

outside her cabin, without approaching or being approached. (The narrator does create an "imaginary stranger" who knocks on the cabin door and receives no answer. However, the stranger is an explicit narrative fabrication, invented to affirm the isolation and desolation of the cabin.)

Within a careful focus on the inanimate objects which surround the woman, the restraint and precision for which the narrative voice clearly strains creates an atmosphere of emotional intensity. This intensity directly affects the observing eye, which occasionally winces away from its subject, or gives way to silent but extreme emotional expression: "the eye fills with tears. Imagination at wit's end spreads its sad wings". (Although it is unclear whether this sympathy is directed at the woman, at the situation of the eye itself, at the limitation of the narrator's imagination or at all three factors.) When the actions of the woman are described, the narrator's delicacy and restraint result in a deep sense of poignancy:

Down on her knees especially she finds it hard not to remain so forever. Hand resting on hand on some convenient support. Such as the foot of her bed. And on them her head.

Understatement creates a particularly strong impression of sadness and immobility. Similarly, no explanation is given for her visits to a local tombstone (beyond the suggestion that it holds an attraction which is almost magnetic). The multiple possibilities for this compulsion give it greater significance than would be possible if the narrator had identified the inhabitant of the grave as the woman's child, friend, lover or husband.

Perhaps the most overwhelming feature of this story is the narrator's consciousness of his ignorance concerning his subject. The title "Ill Seen Ill Said" suggests limitations in his perception (as well as limitation in his craft). At the same time the acronym of the title - ISIS - carries ironic connotations of female power and fertility. The narrator does not attempt to

uncover his subject's motivations or emotions, all he can do is describe her actions and environment, since this is all that is accessible to him, without gross falsification.

Prior to the stance of curious detachment adopted by the narrator of "Ill Seen Ill Said", however, the attitudes and expressions of women who are positive about the possibility of fruitful contact with men are virulently ridiculed through parody. This adds a further reductive dimension to the world of Beckett's fiction, since it denies the authenticity of beneficent interaction between the sexes. Beckett recreates the Inferno - without the memory of Beatrice to inspire the guide; he mentions a "ravening" (U 311) God - but not an interceding Madonna; he establishes a sense of the continuity of the world - without the traditional beneficence of the mother-goddess, or without even a corresponding celebration of this continuity; his poets double as their own desperate, confused muses; his narrators are fixated on *thanatos* but not *eros*. Ideals which are conventionally associated with femininity exist as travesties of their traditional power: echoes and inverted imitations, parodic recollections. Through parody, individual women are defined by the poverty of their aspirations (sentimental love, grotesque sexuality) and expression (clichéd love-letters). Ultimately, this is a denial of organic (as opposed to literary) life and regeneration.

WORKS CONSULTED

1. "The History of the English Language", by J. R. H. S. P. ...
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